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Galena, Illinois

During the Lead Mine Era  
(TITLE)

BY

Gary Henry

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of the Arts

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
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GALENA, ILLINOIS  
DIPPING THE LEAD MINE MICA

BY

GARY HENRY

B.S. in Ed., Eastern Illinois University, 1973

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of the Arts at the Graduate School  
of Eastern Illinois University

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS  
1976



The purpose of this work is to present a history of Galena, Illinois, from 1800 to 1900. It was during this time span that Galena was the major trading center for the upper Mississippi Valley.

The story is divided into five chapters, but the main body consists of chapters II, III, and IV. Chapter II deals with federal and local government affairs at the Galena lead district. The first part of the chapter examines the early policy of direct federal control which was effective for only a short time. Litigation over the rights of miners and smelters as opposed to commercial needs brought about the end for direct federal control. The chapter's last section deals with the growth of city government and the problems created by dishonest politicians and an ineffective police force.

Chapter III covers Galena's economic growth. Beginning first with the lead trade and a discussion of mining and smelting techniques, the chapter moves to the other contributors to Galena's economy. Chicago was the largest settlement of the upper Mississippi Valley and it attracted merchants from its earliest days. In the late 1820's and early 1830's large scale manufacturing or the contemporary equivalent of heavy industry began in Galena. Also discussed in this chapter are Galena's river trade and the development of local railroads.

Galena's social development is the topic for Chapter IV. It is here that all the other factors merge to shape Galena's



elaborate. "The title is not difficult to find," he said. "The early 1900s and the early 1900s are the early 1900s. Early 1900s are the early 1900s, the Indian peril, starvation and other frontier problems. The town grew and became a safer and healthier place to live. Local society began to flourish. The wealthy began to move out of the town, living conditions and looked down upon laboring men, log houses and dirt floors although most of the affluent people were but a few years removed from such a situation. This chapter also explores the ethnic and racial side of Galena's history.

The thesis depends heavily upon primary source material with the various Galena newspapers supplying the majority of data.









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## CHAPTER I

### GALENA'S ORIGINS

Illinois' extreme northwestern corner is occupied by Jo Daviess County--a rugged, scenic area. As part of the driftless region Jo Daviess escaped denuding by the various glaciers.<sup>1</sup> The beautiful hills and valleys were left intact as were the rich lead veins. These mineral deposits played an important role in Illinois' settlement, and much has been written about the trade system developed to market the lead. Little accurate information, however, is known about Galena, Illinois, once the region's main shipping center. It is the purpose of this study to record as accurately as possible Galena's pre-Civil War history and importance to Illinois.

Technically Galena was founded in 1826, but its roots stretch back into the previous two centuries. The earliest Illinois explorers were French and some of their maps dated 1687, 1703, and 1744 denote lead deposits near present-day Galena. Rather than organize their own mining settlements, the French prepared the basis for a lead trade that lasted almost into the twentieth century. A trading post, irregularly

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Howard, Illinois: A History of the Prairie State (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), p. 9. The driftless area refers to ground the glaciers went around instead of over.



supplied by Canadian voyageurs, was established upon Galena's future site. Indians mined the ore and exchanged it for European goods. This was not an extensive operation as lead was merely one item used for trade; therefore, only enough was mined to balance out the more valuable pelts.<sup>2</sup>

Some Frenchmen, however, did attempt mining operations. Nicholas Perrot was in the region in 1690 but his stay was short. There was also a group of eighteen or twenty men digging lead in 1743. They prospected by drilling holes with a five-foot auger until a vein was found. When lead was struck excavation commenced and the mineral removed. They worked until enough lead was produced to financially keep them for the year. The lead was transported on horseback to Kaskaskia for sale, and each pack horse carried four or five lead pigs weighing sixty to eighty pounds apiece. It is unknown how long this work lasted, but the Sac and Fox were hesitant to let others settle and mine in the area. The next known white miner was not until 1788 when Julien Dubuque received permission to raise mineral. Dubuque stayed in the area until his death in 1809.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 166; E.H. Schockel, "Settlement and Development of the Lead and Zinc Mining Region of the Driftless Area with Special Emphasis upon Jo Daviess County, Illinois," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. 4 (September, 1917), pp. 176-177; "Galena and Its Lead Mines," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, May, 1866, pp. 682-683; The History of Jo Daviess County, Illinois (Chicago: H.F. Kett and Company, 1878), p. 232; Galena Weekly Gazette, December 17, 1880.

<sup>3</sup>Howard, Illinois, p. 166; Schockel, "Settlement and Development," p. 178; Galena Weekly Gazette, January 7, 1881.





John Shaw was next in sequence for mining. He sent seventy tons of lead to St. Louis in 1816. This was the first shipment forwarded to St. Louis and Shaw is never again mentioned in existing records. For the following three years, nothing is known about activities in the lead region. Then at least two trading posts opened in 1819. Jesse W. Shull and Dr. Samuel Muir began one business and Francois Bouthillier opened the other. This was also the year the legendary Buck Lead was discovered. The mine existed and was supposedly one of the wealthiest ever found, but very little information about it exists.<sup>4</sup>

Shull remained for only one year, but the others stayed considerably longer. Muir practiced medicine at the settlement for ten years, and Bouthillier failed in 1828 after attempting to corner the flour market. He bought flour at \$6.00 a barrel and held it until winter. After the river froze, Bouthillier became the only local source for flour. Unfortunately his supply soured while in storage forcing him to sift it in order to obtain two barrels from one. Despite the high price and inferior quality the consumer had little choice. Bouthillier was making \$20 and \$30 per barrel when a sudden thaw in February, 1828, opened the river. A steamer loaded

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<sup>4</sup>James A. Wilgus, "The Century Old Lead Region in Early Wisconsin History," Wisconsin Magazine of History, June, 1927, p. 402; "Galena and Its Lead Mines," Harper's, p. 686; History of Jo Daviess County, p. 231; Louis Albert Copeland, "The Cornish in South Western Wisconsin," Wisconsin Historical Collection, Vol. 14 (1891), p. 303; Galena Weekly North-Western Gazette, June 13, 1854.



with supplies came into port and ruined Bouthillier's scheme. Nothing is known of Bouthillier after this failure.<sup>5</sup>

This struggling wilderness community was already well known by traders roving the upper Mississippi valley in 1821. At this time the primitive village was known by various names. La Pointe was the most common, but it was also referred to as Frederic's Point after an obscure French trader. In addition, the name January's Point was sometimes applied. This was in honor of Thomas January who arrived in 1821. January was the first man to bring his family to the lead region, and his wife is credited with being the first white woman in the area. Unfortunately, she was not able to cope with the rigorous frontier life. The exact date of her death is unknown, but the body was exhumed in 1826 for reburial in Kentucky.<sup>6</sup>

The settlement continued to be known by the various names until 1826 when a town was officially platted. At that time its official name became Galena, a Latin word for lead sulfide, the highest grade of lead ore known. Since this was the mineral present in the region the name seemed most appropriate.<sup>7</sup>

Another interesting place name in the area is the Fever River which flows through Galena. Many theories are espoused why this name was selected, and even today the topic creates

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<sup>5</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, pp. 253-254.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 231, 234-235, 451-452; Copeland, "Cornish in Wisconsin," p. 303; Galena North-Western Gazette, June 13, 1854.

<sup>7</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, p. 448.



minor controversy. Each argument, however, originates at the same point which is the French name for the river. Some people claim the river was originally named La Riviere au Feve or Bean River. They believe some type of wild bean grew along the banks, but sources from 1829 refute this. This would not, however, necessarily preclude the name Bean River which could have arisen at an earlier period when such beans may have actually existed. Federal legislation organizing Galena called for a town to be created on the Bean River, but the term was never popular and seldom used.<sup>8</sup>

Another theory claims Fever was a corruption of some Frenchman's name, but there is no documentary evidence to support this. One man, in 1853, went so far as to say the Anglicized Fevre was a French technical term for a fireman in a salt mine. The most reasonable theory, though, dates back to the French and Indian War. Fox Indians returned from the war with smallpox-impregnated blankets. After the disease ran its devastating course, the Indians began calling two local streams Fever. The French picked up on this and called the larger stream, leading to their trading post, La Riviere aux Fievier or Fever River. English speaking people retained the idea but changed the spelling to Fever River and called a lesser creek the Small Pox.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 231; Galena Advertiser, August 10, 1829, August 17, 1829.

<sup>9</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, p. 231; Galena Advertiser, August 10, 1829.



In the 1840's and early 1850's a local contingent wanted to change the Fever's name. They believed it was bad publicity and kept people away. One facetious writer remarked others viewed Galena residents as, "...long, lean, lantern-jawed, bilious looking, fever and ague shaking beings....and a whole army of doctors....being the majority of living citizens...."<sup>10</sup> He did not believe changing the name would help, since Galena was bounded on the north by Snake Hollow, on the west by Catfish and Tete des Morts rivers, and on the south and east by Small Pox Creek.<sup>11</sup>

This brief sketch of events presents names used throughout the study and provides a background for events leading up to 1822. That is the year serious mining was first started and the history of Galena can appropriately commence. The territory had been claimed by the Indians, the French, and the British, but it was not until the Americans acquired possession that the mines began real production. It was up to the first American miners to explore the rugged terrain while searching for the one big lode.

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<sup>10</sup> Galena North-Western Gazette, February 1, 1853.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., August 1, 1845, February 1, 1853, February 22, 1853. The Tete des Morts is actually located southwest of Galena in Iowa.





## CHAPTER II

### GALENA AND GOVERNMENT

The Fever River lead region was first administered by federal authorities. An 1807 Congressional act reserved from sale all mineral land found upon the public domain, but did allow such lands to be leased and worked by private persons. The national government reasoned more money could be made from mineral land by renting it than selling it. It was also felt the military lead shortage could be alleviated by a provision that taxed smelted lead. This last provision was based upon Revolutionary War experiences and the fear of another war with England.<sup>1</sup>

The first mining lease for the Fever River area was issued in 1822, and for the next two years the miners had only the rental tax for regulations. Instead of year-round inhabitation, the miners arrived in the early spring, worked their claims through the summer, and left in the fall before winter started. This migration was necessary because of the extreme distance from St. Louis. While the Mississippi River was frozen provisions were curtailed until spring thaw. The

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<sup>1</sup>James E. Wright, The Galena Lead District: Federal Policy and Practice, 1824-1847 (Wisconsin: State Historical Society, 1966), pp. 5-10.



possibility of starving was very real for anyone caught at the mines without adequate winter supplies.<sup>2</sup>

The lax conditions ended in 1824 and 1825. Lieutenant Martin Thomas, Superintendent for the United States Lead Mines, implemented changes for the Fever River mines that he hoped would benefit all concerned. He helped miners by doing away with the compulsory rent which required ten percent of their diggings in smelted lead. Thomas believed this tax was a hardship for the miners, because it forced the additional expense of conducting a smelting operation upon them.<sup>3</sup>

The tax, however, was not entirely rescinded. Under the Thomas plan, the smelters paid the required ten percent of refined lead. Smelters could not operate at the Fever River mines without a license which was obtained by posting a \$10,000 bond. This was a substantial sum and, in return, the smelters received numerous privileges. Each licensed operation was allowed the use of one-half section of land to provide ample fuel for its furnaces, and only smelters could cut timber. In 1825, Thomas required the miners to sell their ore at least once a month. This was not a wise decision. It

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 12; "Galena and Its Lead Mines," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, May, 1866, p. 687.

<sup>3</sup>Wright, Galena Lead District, pp. 14-15; Moses Meeker, "Early History of the Lead Region of Wisconsin," Wisconsin Historical Collection, Vol. 6 (1872), pp. 275, 295-296.



produced a buyer's market among the smelters and prevented the miners from holding back their ore until prices increased.<sup>4</sup>

Under the Thomas regulations a permit was necessary to prospect for lead and a license to mine the ore. These two provisions were designed to prevent confusion over mining claims, and thereby minimize claim-jumpings and legal proceedings. The Superintendent also prohibited work stoppages. The miners had to work their diggings for five consecutive days each week or the claim was forfeit. This provision stopped the migratory movement and forced miners to winter on their claims. By requiring the miners to stay year round, Thomas inadvertently aided the town of Galena. There was now a continual population in the area, and the few merchants did not risk economic ruin by stockpiling large supplies for winter provisions.<sup>5</sup>

Compared to the system existing between 1822 and 1824 Superintendent Thomas' regulations seem restrictive, yet it appears no one objected at the time. For the years 1825 and 1826, there were 419 mining permits issued, but in 1827 the Superintendent allowed 2,384 permits. By 1829, this number increased to 4,253. The licensed smelters multiplied from 8 in 1827 to 52 in 1829. Such increases would not have occurred

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<sup>4</sup>Wright, Galena Lead District, pp. 17-21; Meeker, "Early History," p. 272.

<sup>5</sup>Wright, Galena Lead District, pp. 17-21.



if widespread dissatisfaction with the leasing system existed.<sup>6</sup>

Two events in 1829, however, marked the beginning of the end for the leasing system and the waning of federal influence in local affairs. Captain Thomas Legate replaced Superintendent Thomas who maintained the leasing system by his personal presence. Legate was not capable of that.<sup>7</sup>

Legate contributed to the leasing system's failure, but he was not entirely to blame. He encountered situations that had not confronted Superintendent Thomas. A depression in 1829 lowered lead prices so much that smelters were unable to pay their taxes. Legate tried to relieve the pressure by lowering the rent from ten percent of the smelted lead to six percent. He expected this to keep operations going, but when the rents were still not paid Legate adopted a hard attitude and revoked the smelting licenses in arrears. This hurt his image which was already tarnished by supposed favoritism to the Gratiot smelting business.<sup>8</sup>

Legate lost the miners' support by revoking the year-round work order. The miners feared men working the lead mines only during the summer would deplete the already scarce currency by taking their money to St. Louis and spending it there in the winter. Legate's overall support was further

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-33, 34-40; Galena North Western Gazette and Advertiser, May 7, 1842.





eroded by his assistants' actions. These men were political appointees, and Legate lacked real authority to discipline them or correct any misconduct.<sup>9</sup>

The situation deteriorated until by 1836 the federal government's ability to enforce its regulations was so minimal as to be practically nonexistent. The Gratiot smelting firm sought a declaratory judgment in 1834 regarding the legality of paying rent to the United States. The Attorney General's decision said it was legal for the federal government to collect rent.<sup>10</sup> His opinion, however, was ignored as smelters continued their operations and prospectors worked without legal authorization. Smelters trying to obey the regulations were at a disadvantage, because by 1835 the miners refused to sell ore to anyone deducting the required amount for taxes.<sup>11</sup>

Passions about governmental control ran high during 1835, and the local newspaper became a sounding board for dissidents. One man argued the tax upon miners was decidedly unfair. As an example he claimed a ten percent tax upon agricultural produce would prohibit new farm land being opened since farmers could not pay it. Furthermore, lead miners faced all frontier dangers, and while the tax helped finance their protection from Indians in the early days, it was no longer necessary.

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<sup>9</sup>Wright, Galena Lead District, pp. 34-40.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-43; Galena Gazette and Advertiser, May 7, 1842.

<sup>11</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, May 7, 1842.



In his opinion, the tax served no other purpose than to pay for a sinecure.<sup>12</sup>

Superintendent Legate contended miners had not been singled out for persecution. The protective tariff on lead, he argued, benefited only miners and as such proved there was no conspiracy to defraud them. Legate denied his job being a sinecure by writing, "I have been separated from my professional companions and friends, and suffered in common with the people, all the privations incident to a frontier life and labored in vain for the last six years."<sup>13</sup>

The attack against Legate continued in following issues of the paper. The Superintendent was charged with uneven administration of his office, because it was alleged not all smelters were required to pay taxes. He was also accused of using his post for personal gain. In his capacity as superintendent, Legate decided which land sections would be reserved from public sale. He supposedly placed choice property on the reserved list and then bought it himself. One writer claimed the lack of control resulted in violence, and thus miners were facing risks both physically and financially.<sup>14</sup>

The War Department decided to test its authority in forcing smelters and miners to comply with the regulations. Legal proceedings started in 1836 against the Gratiot smelting

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., February 14, 1835.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., February 21, 1835.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., August 8, 1835, August 22, 1835.



operation. The case went to the United States Supreme Court before reaching a final settlement. The higher court sustained the government's right to collect rent on reserved mineral land.<sup>15</sup>

The United States won the litigation, but lost the real battle. The legal proceedings lasted four years, and in that time the government regulations were not enforced pending the trial's outcome. From 1836 to 1840, no rents were collected, and newly-discovered mineral deposits were not registered. There was no way to determine the amount of back taxes due, and the four-year grace period made it extremely difficult to reinstate controls.<sup>16</sup>

Without a definite government policy more charges of scandal and graft were brought against the superintendent's office. In the midst of this tense situation, John Flannagan arrived in Galena as the new superintendent in July, 1841. It was generally hoped a new administrator could restore order and assure peaceful operations of the Fever River mines, but this was not to be the case.<sup>17</sup>

During the Gratiot litigation, unscrupulous men took advantage of the legal void to further their positions. These men claimed land with actual lead deposits although they were

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., May 7, 1842; United States v. Gratiot, 14 Peters 526 (U.S. 1840).

<sup>16</sup>Wright, Galena Lead District, pp. 44-45; Galena Gazette and Advertiser, May 7, 1842.

<sup>17</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, July 17, 1841.



recorded as mineral free. In doing this, they perjured themselves when filing their claims and swearing there was no mineral on the land they were registering. Their techniques were less refined when seizing operating lead mines. False testimony and bogus documents allowed them to claim ownership by preemption. Then they charged the miners exorbitant rents or sold the claim to the victimized farmers.<sup>18</sup>

Flannagan was charged with being insensitive to the plight of the cheated, but his problem was more unfamiliarity than insensitivity. Flannagan even publicly expressed the desire to help those caught by the land shysters. In a newspaper advertisement Flannagan wrote, "In all applications for Leases, preference will be given to old and present occupants...."<sup>19</sup> Claims recording became haphazard between 1836 and 1840, and this gave the land pirates an in-road for their double dealings. Flannagan wanted to help, but without accurate records there was little he could do.

By 1842, the miners willingly returned to the leasing system, because of their claims' uncertain nature. Flannagan believed this the most reasonable course to follow. His plan was approved in Washington, D.C., and he set about to lease the mines once again. He was also instructed to negotiate with the smelters and arrive at an agreeable settlement for the amount due in unpaid taxes. A successful leasing policy depended upon willing participation by all parties

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., November 6, 1841, November 1, 1842.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., December 29, 1841.





concerned. When the smelters balked at paying taxes they stopped any chance of success and the leasing system again fell into disrepute.<sup>20</sup>

The government desperately needed something to restore its prestige and control. Despite the Gratiot case fiasco renewed efforts were made on the legal front to recover back taxes. Hezekiah Gear was the next man to be challenged by federal litigation. Gear was a leading Galena citizen in addition to being one of the mining area's wealthiest men.

He came to the mines in the late 1820's or early 1830's, and shortly after 1832, discovered one of the legendary lead deposits that made poor men rich overnight. With his wealth assured, Gear expanded his business interests into practically everything available at the time, including smelting. He rapidly became a man accustomed to having his way and flouting authority. He was appointed county school commissioner in 1842, and during his tenure Gear was charged with illegally selling one township's school section. The County Commissioners Court ordered him to reply to these charges, but there is no official record of any response he may have made.<sup>21</sup> Two assumptions may be made. One is that Gear did respond, but it was not recorded; or Gear may simply have chosen to ignore the matter.

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., April 23, 1842, May 7, 1842.

<sup>21</sup>County Commissioners Court Record, p. 157, County Clerk's Office, Jo Daviess County, Illinois.



Gear was also accused by one John S. Faber of trying to start a private war. Faber's opinion of Gear can best be summed up in his own words:

Having been privately notified by H.H. Gear to quit a certain quarter section of land immediately--and if I did not leave said quarter section he would come and put me off by force, regardless of law: Therefore this is to notify Gear....that I am willing to abide the law of the land, and that I can show an older title to said quarter section than he can; but if he will settle no other way but by force, I will meet him face to face as long<sup>as</sup> as there remains a drop of blood in my veins.<sup>22</sup>

There is no other mention of this incident in the newspapers, so it must have been settled by peaceful means. These illustrations show H.H. Gear was a man willing to ignore the law if it stood in his way, and he had wealth and power enough to back his position. The War Department was about to take on a most formidable opponent with their law suit.

Gear brought the matter before the community with a public letter in which he treated the entire affair as a joke. The government suit asked for \$10,000 for illegally entering mineral land, and the federal agent was to collect the money or take Gear to Springfield for trial. Gear claimed he only owed the government \$400, and he willingly paid the agent that amount when the \$10,000 fine was arbitrarily reduced to \$2,000 in lead. Gear believed this would not satisfy Washington, D.C. and he would be tried anyway. In a lighter vein, Gear wrote he had heard of cases where the matter was

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<sup>22</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, April 25, 1845.



settled by a poker game and so the defendant advertised for the services of a professional gambler.<sup>23</sup>

Legal action against Gear commenced in 1843 and ended two years later after the case had advanced to the United States Supreme Court. The government charged Gear illegally entered a piece of reserved mineral land, raised ore, and cut the standing timber, but the defendant contested the land was his by right of preemption. He claimed he originally leased the land through the superintendent's office, and although he had not paid a filing fee the federal land bureau assigned him the title was in the Gear name. It seemed very unfair, to Gear, that when the leasing system was revived the federal government denied his claim and charged him with a crime.<sup>24</sup>

Gear's legal argument was an 1830 law, granting preemption rights to settlers and also rescinded the 1807 law which reserved mineral land from sale. Nevertheless the court found against Gear contending the two laws worked together. Although the 1830 law authorized the sale of land, there was no mention of including the reserved mineral property. The Court noted a careful legislative pattern to protect federal ownership of mineral lands. Thus Gear was illegally taking government property, and he was ordered to stop.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, May 19, 1843.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., June 2, 1843; Galena North-Western Gazette, April 4, 1845.

<sup>25</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, April 18, 1845; United States v. Gear, 3 Howard 120 (U.S. 1845).



The Gear case then returned to the district court for a retrial to ascertain payment for damages. This was in 1845 and feeling against the leasing system and federal control was so strong that the jury found for Gear. It was a repeat of the Gratiot case. The government won the legal battle but was unable to achieve anything at the local level.<sup>26</sup>

The leasing system could not operate without support and cooperation, and in 1846, Congress directed the president to sell the reserved mineral lands, but preemption was not granted. The reserved mineral land was to be auctioned at a public sale with the minimum price being \$2.50 per acre for property with a known lead mine.<sup>27</sup>

President Polk issued a proclamation in July, 1846, authorizing April 15, 1847, as the first day for land sales. Letters immediately appeared in the local paper calling for organization and support to get around the no preemption clause. To present a cohesive front an elected board of arbitrators in each township settled all land-claim disputes. The committees' decisions regarding land ownership were final.<sup>28</sup>

A county wide meeting held January 9, 1847, decided to create a register and bidder for the whole county. The register obtained a map of every township and each legitimate claim

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<sup>26</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, June 13, 1845.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., July 24, 1846.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., July 31, 1846, September 25, 1846, December 4, 1846, December 11, 1846.





was recorded with the occupant's name. The register was present at each sale with the maps, and when a piece of property was offered he told the bidder who the claimant was. The bidder would offer only the minimum price, and he would only bid if the claimant was at the sale. The last provision was designed to guarantee a large turnout at each sale to intimidate speculators. Unfortunately, it is not known how well this plan worked.<sup>29</sup>

The sale of the reserved mineral lands concluded federal influence for the region but its declining authority did not produce anarchy as a viable provincial government existed. Civil and local government developed slowly at the lead mines. Although settlement began prior to 1823, it was not until 1826 that the community was officially named. It was another nine years, to 1835, when the Illinois General Assembly authorized the town's incorporation. This allowed the settlement to elect its own officials and make decisions regarding community welfare. Less than two hundred voters participated in the first election for the town trustees held on September 15, 1835.<sup>30</sup>

Local politics attracted very little attention after the first election. Candidates ran independent of party affiliations and campaigned for more effective city government. This all changed in 1839 with the first partisan election in

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1847.

<sup>30</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, January 17, 1835, August 29, 1835.



Galena's history. Each side lamented the passing of independent campaigns, and each party blamed the other as being the malefactor. Despite Whig prophecy and hoopla the Democrats elected their entire ticket.<sup>31</sup>

The Whig paper immediately charged scandal and fraud--alleging a majority of the election judges were Democrats who did not enforce the voting residency requirements. The Whigs claimed there were not enough people in Galena who met the residency stipulations to account for the 491 ballots cast. A recount discovered 150 fraudulent votes cast by men who either did not meet the length of residency regulation or did not even live within Galena's city limits.<sup>32</sup>

In retaliation the Democrats blamed their opponents for Galena's financial problems. They claimed the last Whig chairman of the town trustees was responsible for Galena's debt through his free issuance of city scrip. The Whigs thought this absurd. There had been only one Whig chairman and since his departure the Democrats had issued \$12,000 in corporation paper.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the most serious charge brought against the Democratic trustees was megalomania. Prior to the 1839

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., March 7, 1839.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., April 4, 1839, April 11, 1839.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., April 25, 1839. City scrip and corporation paper refer to promissory notes issued by the city of Galena. Good money was scarce in Galena's early days and there was never enough to finance a city project. City scrip was issued as an interest-bearing note to bring in spendable currency.



election, the state granted a new charter of incorporation which, by law, had to be submitted to the voters for approval. The Democratic trustees had avoided this and the Whigs claimed they were afraid of losing their power.<sup>34</sup>

The Democrats, on the other hand, believing the new charter was unconstitutional, claimed they could not, in good conscience, place such a document before the public. The Illinois constitution granted suffrage to all white males over twenty-one, but Galena's city charter gave voting and office holding privileges only to United States citizens. The Whig paper took the Democrats to task for their presumptuousness. The new city charter had been approved by the General Assembly, the governor, and the courts, and now Galena's Board of Trustees was prepared to enlighten these officials upon constitutional law. Basically, Galena Democrats were unwilling to risk approval of a charter which would disenfranchise their party's foreign segment.<sup>35</sup>

The Democrats played a stalling game. At times it appeared they were willing to concede and then suddenly the Whigs had the rug pulled out from under them. A prime example of this was in April, 1859, when Galena's town trustees announced the city charter would be submitted for approval. On the night this was to happen the clerk of the board failed to attend the meeting. He had the only key to the storage area where

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., April 11, 1859.

<sup>35</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, May 1, 1859.



the charter was kept, and without the clerk there could be no meeting, and without a meeting the charter could not be submitted.<sup>56</sup>

These cat and mouse games continued until May, 1841, when the charter was finally placed before Galena's residents and accepted. Although any concessions granted to the Democrats are not easily discernable it would seem safe to assume they existed. It is highly unlikely they would hold out for two years against stiff pressure without receiving something in the end. After the charter was accepted, the city prepared for its first election of a mayor and aldermen.<sup>57</sup>

Galena's city government officially changed over to the mayoral system on May 28, 1841, when the newly-elected officials took office. Charles S. Hempstead, Galena's first mayor, believed fiscal reform was the most important issue facing his administration. He promised the city would not start any projects unless there was money available to finance the operation. The new mayor also believed it was necessary for city government to explore all possibilities for raising revenue.<sup>58</sup>

Mayor Hempstead had good cause to be concerned for \$70,000 worth of corporation paper had been issued over the years to pay for city debts. Such free use caused devaluation

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., April 18, 1839.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., April 9, 1841, April 20, 1841, May 14, 1841.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., June 4, 1841.





to twenty-five or thirty cents on the dollar making Galena's credit worthless. The city treasury with only \$134 in good money was another reason for worry.<sup>39</sup>

In an effort to get the city back on its feet, the new government cancelled all public work contracts and refused to pay any city debts until 1851. A six percent interest was placed on the debts so those caught by the freeze would gain a little extra by being patient. It was also resolved to accept only sound specie in payment for taxes, fines, and fees owed to the city. A licensing system for mercantile businesses was established by the old Board of Trustees. The mayor and aldermen retained this and took it one step further by requiring all vehicles used in public draying service be licensed. Hopefully these provisions would rebuild a solid city treasury.<sup>40</sup>

Over the years Galena's mayors ranged from men of principle, such as Henry B. Truett, to visionaries like John G. Potts. In 1847 the aldermen approved a measure providing annual salaries for city officers. Truett believed they should serve gratis. His refusal to sign the measure created such a furor with the city council that Truett was forced to resign. Mayor Potts saw great things for Galena at his 1853 inauguration. He not only predicted that Galena would be the starting point for the transcontinental railroad but also urged a

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., July 10, 1841.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.



steamboat channel be cut to facilitate easier entrance of the Fever River from the Mississippi. Neither idea bore fruit.<sup>41</sup>

The mayoral system, however, was not without fault. There is evidence of scandal within Galena's pre-Civil War city governments. An 1846 citizens' petition requested a bridge be removed as it was a menace to navigation. Although construction plans called for a drawbridge which would allow the largest of steamboats to pass under it, the structure was never properly finished. A special investigating committee favored retaining the bridge even though it did block navigation. The report stated there was sufficient wharfage to handle all vessels engaged in the Galena trade. The city council was told it would be a waste of money to demolish the bridge as the half dozen business houses located on the lower wharf could easily absorb growing commerce.<sup>42</sup>

The report created almost instantaneous reaction. Corruption was hinted at because the businesses mentioned were on property owned by an alderman. Merchants on the south side of the bridge enjoyed their position and did not want to give it up. Those on the north side had a good levee, a half mile in length, but the boats could not get to them. The problem eliminated itself when a herd of cattle fell through the

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<sup>41</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, December 17, 1847, March 22, 1853.

<sup>42</sup>Galena Semi-Weekly Jeffersonian, May 4, 1846.



bridge demolishing it, but more dissatisfaction with official city policy appeared after this.<sup>43</sup>

The ruined bridge was one of the first two built over the Fever River. Private donations financed the original construction but without centralized authority the structures were not properly maintained. The safety of the other bridge was dubious so the Illinois General Assembly, in 1847, authorized Galena to build two toll bridges. The enabling act stated the toll could be collected only until the bridges were paid for, and Galena's citizens were to be exempted from the duty. The toll was collected, but local residents were not allowed any dispensation.<sup>44</sup>

By 1849 Galena's government faced a citizens rebellion. Attempting to extricate themselves from a difficult spot, the city council approved an ordinance that was a masterpiece in political double talk. It stated Galena's residents would not be charged for crossing the Fever River on foot unless they used the Mecker or Spring Street bridges. Evidently the city would not tax anyone's ability to walk upon water since these were the only two bridges in town. The citizens responded by calling for cooperatively run free ferries or a

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., May 4, 1840, October 12, 1840; Galena North-Western Gazette, September 25, 1840.

<sup>44</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, April 2, 1841, October 30, 1841, January 8, 1842; Galena North-Western Gazette, September 25, 1840, January 1, 1847, April 2, 1847.



bridge to be built at the center of town. The city council yielded against this pressure and repealed the toll on pedestrian traffic.<sup>45</sup>

After such a victory other attempts were made to change local government. Some residents believed city affairs were not completely open. This faction felt a change in administration and the resulting shift in patronage jobs was not reform. Those believing the city government too secretive in conducting its affairs wanted to adopt the New England method of town meetings. Galena never did go to the town meeting for city government, but changes were made in the patronage system. In 1854, appointive jobs like city constable, lumber and harbor master, health officer, and others became elective offices. It seems that political misdoings, centered around filling these appointive posts, brought about pressure to reform until the city jobs were made elective.<sup>46</sup>

Possibly the worst year of Galena's political history is 1857 when letters to the paper brought forth abundant accusations. The city council redistricted the wards to best assure its reelection while city spending was poorly managed and the record books improperly kept. The records indicated a \$12,369 expenditure on the city streets, but one sarcastic letter

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<sup>45</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, February 23, 1849, March 7, 1849, March 14, 1849, March 21, 1849, August 1, 1849, August 19, 1849, August 22, 1849.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., March 14, 1849, January 17, 1854, March 14, 1854.





writer wanted to know exactly where the improvement could be found since he failed to see any change at all.<sup>47</sup>

A supposedly bipartisan movement started in February, 1857. The organization proposed reforming Galena's politics by preparing a citizen's ticket for the March election. Its candidates were selected not according to party, but by their desire to improve Galena as a community. The citizens' ticket had eighteen candidates, but the people in power were not receptive to the idea of reform. The three men they elected to office gave them no position from which to wield any great power and thus the reform movement ended.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the corruption Galena's city government did try to provide services for the residents. One such item was law enforcement. Although sources are scattered and incomplete the first recorded crime in Galena's history occurred in September, 1828. A justice of the peace court tried a black man for wife beating. The sentence was twenty-five lashes, but he received an additional forty lashes for attempting to kill the guard with an axe. There was no jail in Galena at the time so a shack sufficed, but he dug his way out and vanished from sight.<sup>49</sup>

Law enforcement was not always as fast nor as severe as that meted out to the black man in 1828. Galena's first case

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., February 24, 1854.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., March 3, 1857.

<sup>49</sup>Galena Miners' Journal, September 15, 1828.



of manslaughter happened May 26, 1832. It involved two miners that had been quarreling since the previous day, and the matter ended on Main Street when one man died of a gunshot wound. The other man gave himself up to the authorities. After an examination before a local justice of the peace, he was released and never stood trial.<sup>50</sup>

The local papers are surprisingly free from accounts of violent disputes, but this may be due to careful editing. Settlers would not be attracted by continued reports of violence in the streets. Manslaughter was likely more common than reported for as one Galena editor wrote about the prevalence of knives, "...almost every man or boy can show one of these weapons and a quarrel or dispute is generally certain to terminate in their use, either in offense or defence."<sup>51</sup>

To enforce the law, there had to be a system by which violators could be brought to justice. While some mining communities of a later period used vigilante law to bring order this was not the case in Galena. There is only one recorded episode of citizens taking matters into their own hands, and that occurred in June, 1845, when a group of townspeople deliberately razed a brothel. The local paper explained that "The mob was instigated to this act by the suspicion that an outrage of a character too horrible to be mentioned, had been

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<sup>50</sup>Galena Galenian, May 30, 1832.

<sup>51</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, January 21, 1837.



committed upon a man by the inmates of the house."<sup>52</sup> It was left to the reader's fertile imagination to picture the sordid details.

The city government obviously tried to maintain order. Men were hired as city constables, city policemen, city sheriffs, city marshals, and night watchmen. Despite such titles the ability to enforce the law depended upon the character and courage of the men hired. Some men, such as Orrin Smith and J.A. Gallagher, were excellent police officers. Both men were brave and capable of rapidly sizing up a situation and proceeding in the best manner.

Smith was small and at least once he had trouble arresting a much larger man. The suspect refused to go to jail and lay down in the street. Instead of attempting to move him, Smith commandeered an ox team and made known his intention to drag the recalcitrant to jail. The suspect willingly walked.<sup>53</sup>

Gallagher acquired his reputation by conducting an investigation and leading the raid that captured a gang of counterfeiters. The gang, operating out of the Iowa territory, passed false money to Galena merchants. They were also horse thieves and burglars. Gallagher's efforts paid off when he captured the entire gang, the counterfeiting plates, and some of the stolen goods in one raid.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, June 13, 1845.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., April 29, 1841.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., June 25, 1847.



Praise for Galena's police force was an exception to the rule, because it seemed the peace-keeping officers were constantly being upbraided on inefficiency and cowardice. This was the case in March, 1848, when an unknown, heavily armed man, paraded up and down Main Street. The newspaper stated not one local policeman attempted to take him into custody and an alderman was finally forced to do it.<sup>55</sup>

Again in 1856, the police experienced the editorial pen. Two separate fights started on July 20th, and the police did nothing to curtail them. The editor lamented that, "Among the good things we may hope for, when the Millenium comes, is an efficient police system in Galena."<sup>56</sup> August, 1856, brought another biting comment about police inefficiency. During the night of August 18th, a man was beaten and robbed while the thieves escaped without any clues as to their identity. The paper said the purpose of a night watch was to prevent such occurrences, but the Galena night watchmen, "...are usually warming themselves on the outside by a grocery fire and on the inside with whiskey punch!"<sup>57</sup>

The editor could comment upon police ineptness, but others were not allowed this privilege. Rudolff Spier filed assault and battery charges in 1853 against a Galena policeman. Spier

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., March 21, 1848.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., July 22, 1856.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., August 10, 1856.





had remarked about police inefficiency, and the officer beat him for it. The policeman was fined \$20.<sup>58</sup>

Local policemen did not have a good reputation, but then neither did Galena's lawyers. In one townsman's opinion, "Three or four of our lawyers are good fellows enough, but the rest are a miserable, drunken, gambling, aristocratic, overbearing, surly, crabbed set of scoundrels as ever disgraced any bar in the known world."<sup>59</sup> Galena's policemen and lawyers may have left much to be desired, but they were dealing with the very dregs of society. Violence, as a way of life, existed when the mines opened and it carried over even into the 1840's. It appears as if fighting was necessary to prove or maintain one's virility. There is an instance in 1855 when a man married in the morning and left his new bride a widow before evening, because he lost a fight trying to prove his masculinity.<sup>60</sup>

With this type of attitude it is remarkable that any order could be kept. Wearing a badge was not always a sufficient deterrent, and there are cases where law officers were forced to shoot assailants in unprovoked attacks. City policemen were exposed equally to danger and boredom. Despite Galena's economic and social growth it remained, in many aspects, a booming mining town isolated on the frontier.

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., July 5, 1854.

<sup>59</sup>Elihu N. Washburne to George W. Lakin, Galena, Illinois, September 20, 1840, University of Wisconsin at Platteville, Archives, Lakin Papers.

<sup>60</sup>The History of Jo Daviess County, Illinois (Chicago: H.F. Kett and Company, 1878), pp. 353-354.



Entertainment could often be found only in a bottle and peace officers may have turned in this direction to forget the violence or the boredom of frontier existence.

In review, Galena's experiences with two governments makes it unique. Direct federal control of a frontier community is scarcely known, but it made a significant contribution to the town's development. The federal authorities were responsible for creating Galena. They provided a system for orderly exploration, mining, and when necessary protection. Changing economic and social needs caused the system's decline. The lower lead prices after 1829 made the tax seem onerous, and as the area became more stable the need for federal control lessened.

Galena's own provincial government exemplified the motivating force behind settling the lead region. The philosophy of anything to make a dollar remained uppermost in men's minds when they came to Galena, and this carried over into politics. There is not enough data available to ascertain the percentage of dishonest politicians, but they did exist and Galena was cursed with them.



### CHAPTER III

#### GALENA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Commerce is the key factor in Galena's history. The region's abundant lead ore represented a commodity in demand, and a system of trade developed whereby middle men exchanged goods for the mineral. The earliest trade was between local Indians and French voyageurs. A large Sac and Fox village, which the French used for trading purposes, once stood upon the current Galena town site. It is not known when the camp was deserted or when the voyageurs stopped using it, but the earliest settlers recorded evidence indicating that white men had been there before them.<sup>1</sup>

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Americans gradually exerted influence over the upper Mississippi lead mines. Although there is a known lead shipment to St. Louis in 1816 the area did not begin substantial production until 1826. Lead mining advanced through various phases. The earliest

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<sup>1</sup>B.H. Schockel, "Settlement and Development of the Lead and Zinc Mining Region of the Driftless Area with Special Emphasis upon Jo Daviess County, Illinois," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. 4 (September, 1917), pp. 175-177; The History of Jo Daviess County, Illinois (Chicago: H.F. Kett and Company, 1878), pp. 232, 451-452; "Galena and Its Lead Mines," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, May, 1866, p. 686; Galena North-Western Gazette and Advertiser, June 4, 1841; Galena North-Western Gazette, June 27, 1854.



method was that used by the Indians with mining as a woman's job. After finding an outcropping of ore, they built a fire to heat the rocks and then poured cold water on the hot surface. This was the Indian equivalent to blasting powder. Using hoes and axes, obtained through trade, the women worked the area by breaking the mineral into easily carried chunks. A log furnace smelted the ore, and this primitive process supplied enough lead for trading purposes.<sup>2</sup>

The first American to engage in serious mining was a Kentuckian, Colonel James Johnson. He came to the region in 1822 as the first leasee of government mineral land. Johnson brought a large retinue containing experienced miners, 150 slaves, mining equipment, and supplies to provision the entire outfit. Word of Johnson's success spread attracting others to the mineral lands--including English capitalists. Before investing any money, the English company sent geological teams to conduct a scientific survey of the Fever River area in 1837 and 1838. The report stated the lead deposits were near the surface, widely scattered, and soon to be exhausted. On the basis of this report, the company did not invest any money.<sup>3</sup>

The Johnson enterprise and the English interest represented the first large-scale attempts to mine ore, but they

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<sup>2</sup>Moses Meeker, "Early History of the Lead Region of Wisconsin," Wisconsin Historical Collection, Vol. 6 (1872) p. 231.

<sup>3</sup>Schockel, "Settlement and Development," p. 178; "Galena and Its Lead Mines," Harper's, pp. 686-687; Galena Gazette and Advertiser, November 3, 1843; Galena North-Western Gazette, January 4, 1853.





were ahead of their time. The more common method usually involved a one or two man operation. Men engaged in this kind of work were called prospectors. They sought a likely looking spot, sank a shaft, and hoped for a vein of ore. A shaft, about twelve feet in diameter, went straight down until striking galena limestone. It was here the mineral was most often found. If a vein was not present, the miner would drift, or excavate horizontally, away from the shaft looking for a lode. After making a strike the ore was taken back to the shaft, dumped into a bucket, and raised to the surface with a windlass.<sup>4</sup>

To get around the uncertainty of sinking random shafts, a mythology developed for locating underground crevices. The miners claimed spring grass grew more luxuriantly over a crevice. This clearly indicated a fissure, but it did not guarantee the presence of lead. Underground fissures with lead were located by searching for a weed known by several different names--lead weed, mineral weed, masonic weed, or amorphacanscens. This plant supposedly sent roots to a depth of fifty or sixty feet to anchor itself in a lead-bearing crevice. If several plants grew together, the prospector believed it was a sure sign for lead.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Schockel, "Settlement and Development," pp. 130-181; "Galena and Its Lead Mines," Harper's, pp. 639-690; Galena Gazette and Advertiser, September 22, 1843.

<sup>5</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, p. 84; Galena North-Western Gazette, September 13, 1854; Galena Democrat, September 13, 1840.



Prospecting was a haphazard, expensive, and tiring process, but there were other ways to make money at the Fever River mines. People with enough capital to post the \$10,000 bond could engage in the less risky business of smelting lead ore. The earliest smelting method utilized the log furnace. This was an extremely wasteful operation as it cost much time in labor to build and prepare each log furnace, great quantities of fuel were consumed, and it only yielded about fifty percent pure lead.<sup>6</sup>

The log furnace followed a basic pattern. It was built into a hillside for easy loading with the hill being used as a back wall. Each furnace had two stone work chambers about four feet wide, ten feet long, and the height varied from eight to twelve feet. The bottom of each chamber was inclined and paved with stones to allow the molten lead to run out. Four-foot oak logs were placed on a ledge, six inches above the chamber floor, to provide the base. Upright logs were positioned along the chamber walls, and, depending on the furnace, 2,500 to 4,000 pounds of mineral could be fired at a time. Dry brush acted as kindling with fresh fuel added until the base logs ignited, and then the fire was allowed to burn itself out. The firing process took twenty-four hours to fully consume the sulphur present in the lead. After cooling, the ashes were removed and washed. The lead obtained

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<sup>6</sup>Galena Democrat, September 12, 1840.



from the ashes was not fully smelted and had to be fired again in an ash furnace.<sup>7</sup>

The ash furnace, also built against a hillside for easy loading, was a smaller structure requiring more elaborate masonry. It consisted of two stone work boxes with the bottom one collecting the molten lead while the upper chamber served as a hearth. The chimney did not rise vertically but followed the hillside on a forty-five degree angle. The un-smelted mineral from the log furnace was placed in the chimney where hot gasses from the hearth passed over the ore melting it. The molten lead ran down the chimney and into the lead box where there were two eyes for escape. The upper eye remained open for the slag to run out, but when the lead reached the top opening the attendant unplugged the bottom one. The pure lead poured through the lower eye and was ladled into pig moulds. The ash furnace produced about ten to fifteen percent pure lead.<sup>8</sup>

Information about technological advances in smelting lead ore at the Fever River mines is vague. The log and ash furnaces were used from 1823 until some time in the 1830's. It is known that the cupola furnace was in use by 1837 because in that year, L.A. Drummond, of Galena, made improvements upon its operation. Thereafter, it was known as the Drummond

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<sup>7</sup> History of Jo Daviess County, pp. 839-840; Meeker, "Early History," pp. 286-287.

<sup>8</sup> History of Jo Daviess County, p. 840; Meeker, "Early History," pp. 286-287; Galena Democrat, September 12, 1840.



furnace. The cupola furnace had a chimney approximately forty feet high. The powerful draw this created caused the flame to pass over the mineral rather than burn directly in contact with it. A cupola or Drummond furnace had a seventy-five to eighty-five percent yield.<sup>9</sup>

By the 1840's, and certainly by the 1850's, the blast furnace had come to Galena. Coal was used for fuel and steam-driven bellows kept air constantly moving during the refining process. A blast furnace used much less fuel than any other kind and yielded seventy to eighty percent. The blast furnace had another advantage. It could smelt slag with about a fifty percent return. The Norris Smelting Company of Galena, operating with a blast furnace in 1852, produced as many as sixty pigs a day from slag.<sup>10</sup>

Just as smelting started from a primitive basis and advanced to a more technological state the method of mining also changed. The individual prospecting methods were adequate for the mining period from 1822 through the late 1840's when the mineral deposits nearest the surface could be easily worked, but by midcentury the area was well explored and new lead strikes were rare.

Although the surface deposits were almost depleted, known veins of lead existed below the water table, but great outlays

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<sup>9</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, p. 341; Galena Democrat, September 12, 1840.

<sup>10</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, pp. 340-341; Galena Democrat, September 12, 1840; Galena North-Western Gazette, January 15, 1851, October 4, 1854.





of cash were necessary to mine ore at this depth. Steam-powered machinery was required to operate pumps for draining the mines and engines to raise the ore. This made deep mining beyond the means of the average prospector. Even if he could afford the steam engines, pipes, and cables the fuel cost would ruin him before the mine began to pay.<sup>11</sup>

It was evident individual prospecting would no longer be practical and in January, 1853, came the first call for a stock company to experiment in deep mining. The first proposal sought an initial operating capital of \$6,000 to sink a deep shaft at Vinegar Hill near Galena. Another proposal, made a month later, asked for \$20,000 to be spent in the following manner: one-third for land, one-third for equipment, and one-third for labor. No follow-up evidence in the newspapers indicates either proposal gained supporters.<sup>12</sup>

Enthusiasm for organizing mining companies may have been lacking at the local level, but the upper Mississippi mines eventually attracted the attention of eastern speculators. The New York based American Mining Company started a branch operation at the Sinsinawa Mound, Wisconsin, approximately six miles from Galena.<sup>13</sup>

The company worked an old claim called the Jamestown Diggings where known lead deposits were below the water table.

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<sup>11</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, August 12, 1851. Due to the wanton use of wood for log furnaces, fuel was scarce and expensive in the early 1850's.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., January 4, 1853, February 15, 1853.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., August 23, 1853, October 11, 1853.



Pumping operations began in August, 1853, and by November men could be lowered to a point below the water line. Float deposits, or branch veins feeding into the champion lode, were discovered, and one single ore specimen found weighed three hundred pounds.<sup>14</sup>

This was an encouraging sign so operations continued. By January, 1854, the American Mining Company employed one hundred men at the Jamestown Diggings. The shaft was 112 feet deep in February, 1854, and the average weekly output was 30,000 to 40,000 pounds of mineral. The pumps managed to keep the water out, and by 1856, the shaft had descended 143 feet below the surface. At this point, the company drilled another twenty feet, and the core sample revealed another eight feet of mineral.<sup>15</sup>

The American Mining Company's success worried the local newspaper editor. While grateful the company proved lead deposits did exist much deeper than anyone thought and that they could be reached, the editor feared all the area's money would be pulled east. He advocated forming local mining companies to do what the American Mining Company had done, thus keeping all the money.<sup>16</sup>

There is nothing in available records indicating the extent to which local companies were formed, but there must

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., August 23, 1853, November 22, 1853.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., January 24, 1854, February 21, 1854, January 29, 1856.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., February 12, 1856.



have been some. For example, the firm of Hempstead and Washburne advertised for one hundred men to work an old mine. This would seem to indicate these men owned a mining company and employed local workers.<sup>17</sup> The formation of Galena based mining companies was the last stage in the great wealth created by the lead trade.

The money created from mining did more than make a few men rich. It changed Galena from an isolated frontier community into the state's leading commercial center.

In 1834, five merchants advertised their wares in Galena. Each business carried a wide variety of goods and among the common inventory were: 12 traps, 2,000 pounds of fresh pork, 50 bushels of potatoes, 100 boxes of melee cigars, 450 barrels of flour, 10 barrels of gin, 170 kegs of butter, and 135 barrels of various types of whiskey. Money was scarce and local transactions operated on the barter system. The North Western Gazette and Galena Advertiser allowed subscribers to pay by supplying the office with winter wood. Merchants exchanged their goods for mineral or farm produce and sold the ore for cash which the eastern supplying houses demanded.<sup>18</sup>

The city's wealth improved during the 1840's as it was a time for expansion. A livery stable proprietor increased his operation in 1841. His original stable accomodated sixty horses, but the report failed to mention its capacity after

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., December 11, 1836.

<sup>18</sup>Galena Galonian, March 14, 1834; Galena Gazette and Advertiser, December 19, 1838, January 1, 1839.



enlargement. Even a sixty horse stable would have been a large and expensive operation, and a further expansion indicates that business was good and the local economy sound.<sup>19</sup>

Galena had an estimated population of 5,500 in 1845. The city offered a variety of business and professional services including 27 wholesale and retail dry goods houses; 10 wholesale groceries; 34 retail grocery and provision stores; 12 boot and shoe makers; 13 tailors; 12 blacksmiths; 8 hotels; 4 watchmakers; 5 apothecaries; 27 physicians; 5 breweries; and at least 52 other business concerns.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps the single most important business venture of the decade was opening a city-operated market house in 1846. Agitation for a market house began in 1841, but with the usual efficiency of the Galena city government, the project stalled for five years. The idea was to have a centrally located spot where farmers could sell their produce without resorting to street vending. This not only aided farmers, but it eased congestion. The market house also helped stabilize prices as any differences could be spotted easily since the sellers were located only a few feet apart. The market house was so successful that in 1854 some advocated expanding the facilities to keep pace with the growing city. This, however, did not happen.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, October 16, 1841.

<sup>20</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, September 19, 1841.

<sup>21</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, September 21, 1841; Galena Semi-Weekly Jeffersonian, April 30, 1846; Galena North-Western Gazette, November 23, 1854.





the entire year, the city had exports valued at \$1,600,000. Of course, this amount includes \$1,522,611 in lead.<sup>22</sup>

Economic growth during the 1840's was mainly in the production of lead and agricultural goods. The money accumulated during this time financed a new economic interest in the next decade--namely heavy manufacturing. Some industry existed prior to 1850, but for the most part Galena was a city involved with the selling and shipping of goods rather than the production of such items.

Conditions changed in the early 1850's. One of the large manufacturing concerns was the Harris saw mill. E. C. Daniel Harris spent \$15,000 in 1851 to construct a steam-powered saw mill. Galena had saw mills before this venture, but none could compare to the Harris operation. The plant was powered by two steam engines, equal in strength to those used on the steamboat Franklin no. 2, and capable of operating eight saws. The mill opened October, 1851, and only four months later two upright saws worked around the clock cutting a minimum of 10,000 board feet a day.<sup>23</sup>

The Star Eagle Steam Flouring Mill developed concurrently with the Harris operation. The plans were made in 1849, but work did not commence until 1850 with full capacity attained

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<sup>22</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, December 27, 1848.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., July 15, 1851, October 1, 1851, February 24, 1852.



in 1854. The investment in the mill neared \$25,000, and it was a massive undertaking. Financed by Edward Hempstead, Elihu Washburne, and Captain Hiram Bersie the plant covered a six acre site and consisted of three buildings. The four story hewn stone main building was sixty feet long and forty-two feet wide, and the two out buildings were nearly the same size. Two steam engines powered four burr stones, and when in full operation the War Eagle Mill could grind 1,250 bushels of wheat a day. The operation was reputed to be "...the best steam flouring mill in the Mississippi Valley and not surpassed by any mill in the United States."<sup>24</sup>

Another heavy manufacturing interest for the 1850's was the foundry business. John Dowling, one of Galena's earliest settlers, practiced the family trade of tinsmithing, and after his death his son guided the business into one of the best known iron foundries for the upper Mississippi valley. Nicholas Dowling built a five story, twenty-three by ninety-eight foot brick building in 1849. The Dowling operation outgrew this building within three years and required different facilities. The new building had two floors set aside for storage of the Dowling patterns which numbered in the thousands. These were destroyed by fire in the spring of 1853, and, according to the local paper, the loss was felt all over

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., November 7, 1849, April 1, 1851, April 25, 1854.



the upper valley. Undaunted, Dowling rebuilt his foundry and had it operating by the following December.<sup>25</sup>

The manufacturing concerns grew to be an integral part of Galena's economy, but the one commercial interest closest to the lead trade's importance was river traffic. Lead may have been the impetus for Galena, but the river kept the city alive. Steamboating on the upper Mississippi presented problems not present in the southern trade. Two sets of rapids existed between St. Louis and Galena dictating that vessels used for up-river navigation be smaller and lighter in order to pass over them. A captain's main concern was with the draw of his boat especially during low water. Keel boats and barges were often towed as cargo holds. Freight could be transported this way without making the steamboat hull too deep for clearing the rapids.<sup>26</sup>

The early days of steamboating left much to be desired. During the 1827 rush to Galena, one party experienced great frustration because their vessel was not powerful enough to

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., December 9, 1849, December 21, 1852, May 24, 1853, December 27, 1854.

<sup>26</sup>William J. Petersen, "The Lead Traffic on the Upper Mississippi, 1823-1848," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. 17 (June, 1950), p. 82; William F. Peterson, Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi: The Water Way to Iowa (Iowa City, Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1937), p. 213. These impediments were known as the upper and lower rapids. The upper rapids were located at the influx of the Rock and Mississippi Rivers, and the lower rapids formed at the confluence of the Des Moines and Mississippi Rivers.



cross the rapids. After several days of failed attempts, a dozen men disembarked and walked to Galena.<sup>27</sup>

Galena's location on the farthest fringes of the frontier provided many traveling hardships. A family named MacLean left Philadelphia on August 23, 1838, and Mrs. MacLean's journal illustrates the many difficulties they faced. After five days into the journey she wrote, "Like Lot's wife I look back with longing desire." Her journal also told of many long hours suffering discomfort from the heat and obnoxious odors while their vessel was trapped on a sandbar. The journey proved costly for Mrs. MacLean and she recorded, "...our baggage is seriously injured from the water in the flatboat, many of my most valuable things completely ruined, I am much grieved...." Near the end of September the strain showed in her writing. Her entry for September 23, reads, "This is the fifth Sunday I have spent travelling; oh when will this long journey end?" The MacLean family arrived in Galena two days later to begin a new life on the frontier.<sup>28</sup>

Although steamboats possessed disadvantages and technical flaws they rapidly became a main part of Galena's economy. By 1851, Galena residents owned thirteen steamboats with an approximate investment value of \$150,000. These boats, however,

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<sup>27</sup>Frederick Hollman, "Memoirs" (unpublished mss), University of Wisconsin, Platteville.

<sup>28</sup>Journal of Mrs. MacLean, 1838, and Letters of Mr. Snyder, 1834 and 1836, pp. 12-1, 24. Pamphlet in the possession of the Galena Public Library Historical Collection, Galena, Illinois.





do not represent all the vessels using Galena as a port of call. In 1853, there were only five less boats running between Galena and St. Louis than between New Orleans and St. Louis. This amply illustrates Galena's commercial activity, and it is no wonder that Galena was considered the business center for the entire upper Mississippi valley.<sup>29</sup>

St. Louis was the market place for Fever River lead, but Galena also had business interests to the north. The Galena and Minnesota Packet Company started in 1847 with one steamboat. Owned and controlled in Galena the company operated successfully and gradually expanded. By 1856, it owned eleven steamboats and employed six hundred men. Galena's businessmen did all they could to encourage Minnesota merchants to buy from them. The Minnesota Chronicle and Register also urged merchants to buy their goods at Galena by saying the Galena prices were comparable to St. Louis with just as wide a selection.<sup>30</sup>

From the opening of navigation to its close each year, the Galena levee offered a scene of activity. The city trustees created the post of Harbor and Lumber Master in 1837. This designated one man in charge of the harbor and he decided

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<sup>29</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, September 16, 1851, May 17, 1853. The May 17, 1853, issue supplied information about the number of vessels engaged in the St. Louis trade. There were 39 boats running between Galena and St. Louis; 40 between New Orleans and St. Louis; 36 between Pittsburgh and St. Louis; 26 between St. Louis and the Missouri River; and 10 between St. Louis and the Illinois River.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., May 1, 1850, April 8, 1850.



where the boats should dock. As it turned out, this was a very good year to have someone controlling the Galena harbor. There were 717 steamboat landings during the 1837 season, and this represented a dramatic increase from the 110 landings in 1834.<sup>31</sup>

The Galena harbor was the acknowledged leader for all shipping in the upper valley. For example, for the years 1846 and 1847 there were 1,505,549 pigs of lead shipped from all the upper Mississippi ports but of that amount 1,399,429 pigs were shipped from Galena. An intense rivalry existed between Galena and Dubuque, Iowa, but even Dubuque admitted to Galena's superior trade. The Dubuque Herald, quoted by Galena's North-Western Gazette, said in 1851, "The amount of trade transacted at Galena by the upper Mississippi country alone, since the opening of navigation, is equal, if not greater, in amount, than the entire trade at Dubuque in the same time from every quarter."<sup>32</sup>

Galena's commerce was so intense there were times the levee was inadequate to handle the trade. The city failed to properly maintain the levee and any proposal to spend money for improvement was greeted unfavorably. Writing as early as 1839 of the problem, Hezekiah Gear remarked his plans to protect and improve the landing caused his political popularity

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<sup>31</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, April 22, 1837, December 9, 1837; Galena Galenian, November 5, 1834.

<sup>32</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, March 28, 1848, December 12, 1849, September 16, 1851.



to decrease. Harbor improvements received little support as is shown by an 1841 appropriation of only \$100 to build a basin so the boats could turn around.<sup>33</sup>

The Fever River's sluggish current failed to carry away the rapidly accumulating silt. In 1827, the river was described as being about 375 feet wide opposite Galena, but a visitor to the city in 1841 described the Fever as looking like a large canal. The visitor also remarked his steamboat made several attempts, at full power, to plow through the mud and get close to the landing.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these warnings nothing was done to improve the levee. An 1848 editorial said, "It is the harbor of Galena that makes Galena what it is. If the harbor is allowed to fill up, the city will move off to some other harbor."<sup>35</sup> The editorial also commented the time was at hand to improve their facilities. The equipment could be had at a reasonable price and further delay would just increase the expense, but still city government remained inactive.

Public opinion began to shift about 1851 as the quantity of trade increased and the steamboats kept getting larger. In 1851, there had been instances where steamers had to back from Galena to the Mississippi because they could not turn

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<sup>33</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, March 7, 1839, October 16, 1841.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., September 18, 1841; Glenn T. Trewarth, "The Earliest Map of Galena, Illinois," Wisconsin Magazine of History, September, 1939, p. 45.

<sup>35</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, June 7, 1848.



around at Galena. Also in 1851, there were occasional days when more steamers came to port than the Galena levee could accomodate. City government was pressured in 1852 to increase the wharf area, dredge the harbor, and widen the basin so boats could pass each other without getting stuck and turn around instead of backing to the Mississippi River.<sup>36</sup>

The city government yielded and work began in September, 1852, to enlarge the levee. The completed job almost doubled the wharf area, but this proved ineffective. The 1853 spring trade was larger than any previous season, and local sources claimed the new levee had only half the capacity needed to accomodate the increase. The freight came in and went out faster than the levee could accept it. Confusion reigned as goods piled up and congestion increased. The trade was so brisk that ten steamboats were in Galena's little harbor on May 2, 1853. The city council had also appropriated \$2,000 for dredging the harbor and the work commenced in May, 1853.<sup>37</sup>

The river and harbor improvements came too late. In the eyes of long-time Galena resident, the peak year was 1850 and business fell afterwards on an annual basis. Compared to earlier years 1852 was very slack with only \$801,234 worth of pig lead shipped by water as compared to shipments valued at

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., May 18, 1851, October 28, 1851, November 24, 1851, February 10, 1852. The exceptionally large boats began to use the Galena harbor after 1851--such as the Ben Campbell, 200 feet, in 1852; the Brunette, 195 feet, in 1852; the Michigan, 250 feet, in 1853; and the Northern Belle, 225 feet, in 1856.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., June 22, 1852, September 14, 1852, October 19, 1852, April 16, 1853, May 10, 1853, May 1, 1853.





over \$1,000,000 for each year between 1848 and 1853. The situation grew worse in 1858 when the Galena Gazette reported some local merchants, unable to collect their debts, were forced out of business. The paper tried to give the city moral support by saying things were worse elsewhere and conditions were bound to improve.<sup>38</sup>

Things did not get better. Usually, during each trading season, the paper described the activity and congestion at the levee and on Main Street that marked Galena from the opening of navigation to its close. For 1859, the best to be said was, "Business is evidently reviving. Saturday, some parts of Main street were crowded with teams."<sup>39</sup>

There are at least two reasons why Galena's trade fell off at this time. Lead production steadily declined after 1849 and as trade in the basic commodity dwindled there was less demand for other products. The advent of the railroad is the other factor. Prior to the Illinois Central's completion the small communities in the lead region relied upon Galena for supplies. The railroad's eastern connections ended this dependency. Merchants in other communities could now order their own stock and have it delivered via the railroad.

The relationship between Galena and the railroad is a long and arduous one dating back to 1836 when the Galena and

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., February 23, 1858, May 24, 1858; Augustus L. Chetlain, Recollections of Seventy Years (Galena, Illinois: The Gazette Publishing Company, 1899), p. 46.

<sup>39</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, September 27, 1859.



Chicago Union Railroad was created. Interest in the project died only to be revived about ten years later. The usual series of arguments expressing the need for a railroad were put before the public. Even some unusual arguments were presented. One member of the board of directors claimed railroads were a righteous necessity since, "A railroad is far different from a canal....its moral influence is far better. A canal debases and a railroad elevates people in a moral scale....A railroad brings society together--its blessings are extended, and we are all made neighbors."<sup>40</sup>

While his listeners tried to comprehend his logic, the speaker moved on to the actual point. The railroad would be an economic boon for Galena. By using the telegraph and the railroad local merchants would not have to buy their stock six months in advance and risk the market's unpredictability. The Galena and Chicago Union Railroad began construction from Chicago in 1848.<sup>41</sup>

A minor scandal in 1850 rocked the project's support in Galena. The Chicago-based board of directors decided to run the line first to Savanna, Illinois, and then to Galena. Savanna, being a river town located south of Galena on the Mississippi, threatened Galena's economic advantage of being the railroad's termination point. One director even sent his son to buy property along the proposed line. The Galena

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., November 5, 1847.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., March 14, 1848.



stockholders quickly brought pressure against the board, and the route reverted to its original course of entering Galena from the north.<sup>42</sup>

The Galena and Chicago Union Railroad became a branch of the Illinois Central after its incorporation in 1851. The Illinois Central announced plans in June, 1852, to begin construction at Galena and work east to meet the crew from Chicago. The line was supposed to be completed in one year's time, but an eight month dispute between the railroad and Galena delayed commencement of the project.<sup>43</sup>

The controversy involved the railroad's right of way within the city. The Illinois Central wanted a free hand in laying the track, locating the depot, and in building a bridge south of the town. Galena wanted some say in the matter, and the city had legal backing for its position. The railroad's charter required it to obtain permission for its route before entering a town, and, by law, the line had to come to Galena. An 1847 law gave the Galena city government authority to prevent any obstruction of the Fever River from its mouth to one mile above the town.<sup>44</sup>

R.B. Mason, chief engineer for the Illinois Central, proposed four possible routes to the city council, but the actual one would be determined only after the right of way was

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., December 17, 1850, December 24, 1850, January 14, 1851.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., June 15, 1852, January 25, 1853.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., January 25, 1853.



granted. The company promised to build side tracks and a depot somewhere within the city limits, but in return the railroad wanted Galena to deed over riverfront property for a private wharf with Illinois Central representatives selecting the ground. A drawbridge would be built, and the railroad would repair the principle streets crossed by the tracks. The city council rejected these proposals. It was said the railroad wharves would be unfair to other merchants and also detrimental to the city's income from wharfage duties. Galena's city government wanted the railroad to repair every street they crossed.<sup>45</sup>

Each side acted in what it considered to be its best interests. The railroad wanted to be the sole carrier for the Galena trade. Its plan to lay tracks on the Fever's left bank and bridge at the mouth for continuing the line to Dunleith would have destroyed Galena's river trade. The city council saw this and refused to grant such a right of way. At first, the city wanted the railroad to build tracks on the east and west side of the river within the corporate limits, but there would be no bridge to connect the rails. The council finally decided to let the company bridge within the city limits, but the Illinois Central would not agree to that.<sup>46</sup>

The company demanded a free hand and when the city would not concede the Illinois Central began scare tactics. The

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, January 11, 1853.





railroad used work stoppages and slow downs to make it look as if all construction would cease if Galena did not yield. When this failed rumors spread that the railroad would tunnel through north of town and bypass the city altogether. The Illinois Central even bought property in the area near the proposed tunnel and created something of a minor panic. There was fear expressed that Galena would be left out, and the city government was pressured to accede to the railroad's demands. Saner minds, however, prevailed.<sup>47</sup>

It was pointed out that tunnelling was very costly and the company would not unnecessarily spend that much money. Even if they should tunnel the line would still come out within city limits, and the company needed permission to do that. Galena's city government had the Illinois Central backed into a corner. A letter to the railroad's vice-president concisely stated Galena's position, "...while the importance of your road is fully recognized, the waters of this port are of yet a greater consequence to this city...."<sup>48</sup>

The dispute was resolved in March, 1853. It is quite evident the city came out ahead. The Illinois Central would lay tracks on both the east and west sides of the river with a depot located on the east side of town. The company could select three hundred feet of waterfront for their private wharf, but stone retaining walls had to be built, and the

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., January 25, 1853.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., January 11, 1853, January 24, 1853.



company was subject to city wharfage taxes. The railroad was responsible for repairing street crossings and had to donate \$10,000 to cover the costs of dredging for its wharf. The company also had to guarantee that its tracks and facilities could be used by any other railroad that might locate in Galena at a future time. A drawbridge had to be built to connect the two sets of rails, and the Illinois Central could not charge any fee for letting vessels pass.<sup>49</sup>

The railroad between Galena and Chicago was completed in the late fall of 1854. The trains started running during the first week in November, and on November 8, 1854, a big celebration was held at the DeSoto Hotel. Approximately five to eight hundred people, including a train load from points east, attended the celebration.<sup>50</sup>

Galena had a great deal to celebrate. The previous year, 1853, had been exceptionally good for the community. The levee was doubled in size, the harbor dredged and improved, and Galena forced the Illinois Central to yield to the city's demands. The economy was good and everyone was confident. As it turned out, the railroad celebration of 1854 was Galena's farewell party.

The railroad was viewed as new prosperity but its advancement to Dunlieth ended that dream. Instead of becoming the terminus, Galena was a way station. Back in 1850 when

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., March 12, 1855.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., October 31, 1854, November 7, 1854, November 14, 1854.



the plans were announced to run the railroad first to Savanna and then to Galena everyone was quick to see the danger. Why no one realized the analogy between Dunleith and Savanna is unknown, but this laxity cost Galena its wealth and prestige in the years to come.

Galena began in response to the lead trade. Its purpose was to serve as a shipping center where miners could obtain supplies and sell their ore. As the years passed more wealth was created in the area and Galena grew more prosperous. The lead trade remained the predominate factor in Galena's economy but diversification commenced in the 1840's.

River trade, both below and above Galena, made an important contribution to the town's wealth. The money created from the lead trade was used to create new business interests. The railroad, of course, greatly damaged Galena's business, but other factors like the declining lead trade crippled the town's economy beyond repair.



## CHAPTER IV

### GALENA'S SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Galena's permanent settlement began with the Moses Meeker party in 1825. Prior to this time only itinerant fortune seekers visited the Fever River. Meeker was attracted by the rumors of wealth and in November, 1822, came to Galena to test their validity.<sup>1</sup> The settlement was hardly impressionable as it consisted of an Indian trader, an odd assortment of fifteen other men, three log furnaces, and one log house. Meeker spent eight days investigating the countryside, and recognized the area's potential despite Galena's unseemly appearance.<sup>2</sup>

Meeker returned home and after making all the necessary preparations his party left Ohio, by keelboat, in April, 1825. The vessel, carrying forty-three people and \$7,000 worth of provisions, arrived in Galena June 20, 1825, after a grueling thirty-one day trip up the Mississippi River. The Meeker party is significant because it was the first large group to

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<sup>1</sup>The settlement was not called Galena at this time. It was known by several names such as La Pointe, January's Point, Frederic's Point, and the Fever River Settlement. The town did not acquire the name Galena until 1826. For simplicity, Galena will be used to refer to the community even for examples before 1826.

<sup>2</sup>Moses Meeker, "Early History of the Lead Region of Wisconsin," Wisconsin Historical Collection, Vol. 6 (1872), pp. 274-275; H.A. Tenney, "Early Times in Wisconsin," Wisconsin Historical Collection, Vol. 1 (1866), p. 95.





include women and children. Others may have brought their families, but not like this since the Meeker party came to settle.<sup>3</sup>

Another important aspect is they brought the basic societal institutions. During their first winter at Galena two members of the group wanted to get married, but no one at the settlement had the legal power to conduct a service. The couple resolved the problem by signing a marriage contract binding each to the other. There was, however, a clause requiring a legal ceremony be performed as soon as an authorized person could be found.<sup>4</sup>

Such a marriage would not have been recognized in the more civilized sections of the world, but this is why it is so important. In 1825, the Galena settlement was located in a little explored wilderness. Settlers had the desire to civilize their condition, but the rules were necessarily modified to fit the existing circumstances. From the time of the French voyageurs, men at Galena tended to ignore the mores by which their European forefathers lived. The Meeker party began to change. The desire for a recognized marriage rather than cohabitation started the slow process that would eventually transform Galena.

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<sup>3</sup>Meeker, "Early History," pp. 276-277; The History of Jo Daviess County, Illinois (Chicago: H.F. Kett and Company (1878), pp. 238-241; William F. Peterson, Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi: The Later May to Iowa (Iowa City, Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1927), p. 218.

<sup>4</sup>Meeker, "Early History," p. 280.



The initial advances made by the Meeker party seemed threatened by the 1827 mining rush. Galena's growth was dramatic as the town increased from 4 log huts to 11½ structures. The living conditions, however, were little better than squalor. Stones and logs were plentiful but other construction material was scarce. One man who failed to get flooring considered himself fortunate to have a roof, and a series of log huts served as a hotel where a dozen men slept in six by eight foot rooms. It all happened too fast for controlling social forces to maintain equilibrium. Galena was a wide open boom town, and a local phrase asserted neither the gospel nor the law could pass the rapids.<sup>5</sup>

Before the year was out, however, the need for organization and social controls was recognized when the Winnebago War of 1827 threatened Galena's precarious existence. The initial and only conflict was between the Winnebagoes and two keelboat crews. The vessels had stopped at an Indian village to camp for the night. Whiskey was plentiful, everyone became intoxicated, and some village women remained aboard all night. This did not register with the Indians until they were sober and the keelboats were several hours gone. At Prairie du Chien the crewmen heard rumors of a planned attack on their

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<sup>5</sup> History of Jo Daviess County, pp. 22-23; Frederick Hollman, "Memoirs" (unpublished mss), University of Wisconsin, Platteville. There were two sets of rapids on the Mississippi between St. Louis and Galena.



down trip. An attempt to get by the Indian village at night failed.<sup>6</sup>

It is uncertain how intense the fighting was, but the survivors did reach Galena. News of their ordeal spread rapidly through the mining region, and people living in the hinterlands rushed to Galena for protection. The men realized they would have to band together and select a leader. It happened that General Samuel Whiteside, of the Illinois militia, was in Galena at the time as was Colonel Henry Dodge from Missouri. Both men wanted the command and both had support so the dispute was settled by an election. The volunteers collected on a level piece of ground and two whiskey barrels were opened. When both were empty it was announced those supporting Whiteside should move to one end of the ground while those for Dodge would occupy the other.<sup>7</sup>

The volunteers were too inebriated to remember for long where they should be. A living mass was undulating as the names Whiteside and Dodge were repeatedly yelled by men trying to find the correct side. The frustration, coupled with the whiskey, was too great and fighting broke out. A rain-storm turned the field to mud as the combatants tore up the turf. In the end, two lines of broke, bloody, wet, mud packed, drunken men were formed, and Dodge won the election.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, pp. 271-273.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., Hollman, "Memoirs," Hollman Mss.

<sup>8</sup>Hollman, "Memoirs," Hollman Mss.



After all their efforts, it was revealed that only twenty men at a time could ride with Dodge since the lack of horses and firearms in Galena made this necessary. They spent five days hunting Indians but found none as the Winnebagoes were satisfied with their revenge. The volunteers disbanded and returned to their old routines.<sup>9</sup>

Galena's rapid growth for the rest of the decade prevented controls to check potentially dangerous elements. There was no regard for sanitation and the streets were littered with dead rats and spoiled bacon. The smell was not only offensive, but it attracted more rats. An advertisement in the Miner's Journal during December, 1828, requested two hundred cats for the Galena market. There is also one reported case of rats attacking a baby.<sup>10</sup>

Primitive living conditions prevailed but a civilizing force once started would not stop. The next major social institution arrived in 1829 when the gospel succeeded in crossing the rapids. The Reverend Aratus Kent came to Galena after asking the American Home Missionary Society "...for a place so hard no one else would take it."<sup>11</sup>

Galena construction had not included churches so Kent bought a building from his own funds and won the local editor's respect. He urged everyone to attend church as the least they

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Galena Miner's Journal, July 22, 1828, December 20, 1828; Galena Advertiser, October 13, 1829.

<sup>11</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, p. 4.





could do after Kent had given so much of himself. Galena's first religious service by an ordained minister was May 10, 1829. Kent's house was unfinished, and the worshippers sat on sleepers for pews.<sup>12</sup>

Religion had come to Galena but its effect was negligible, because throughout the 1830's the town remained a place where vice abounded. The city's reputation was widespread, but some residents believed it was unfairly deserved. They argued Galena's brothels were not patronized by local citizens; rather travellers supplied most of the clientele, and their recounted stories were responsible for Galena's reputation.<sup>13</sup>

An opposing faction believed the city's bad name was fairly gained. In 1835 twenty liquor establishments remained open seven days a week, and the Sabbath was not observed, as businesses of all kinds operated. Galena's estimated population was 1,5000 but less than a third regularly attended church. About twenty professional gamblers lived in Galena

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 106; Galena Advertiser, November 23, 1829. The History of Jo Daviess County lists other churches started in Galena prior to 1830 as the Methodist Church in 1833; the First Baptist Church in 1838; the Episcopal Church in 1839; the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1834; the South Presbyterian Church in 1846; the German Methodist Church in 1846; St. Mary's German Catholic Church in 1852; the First German Presbyterian Church in 1854; and St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1854.

<sup>13</sup> Galena Galenian, May 16, 1831.



while others used the town for their winter headquarters, and casinos operated nightly.<sup>14</sup>

Religion failed to morally uplift Galena's citizens, but some cultural advances were made in the latter 1850's. Men no longer had "...to resort to a filthy grocery with its disgusting concomitants, to find amusement."<sup>15</sup> Social parties and balls became important sources of entertainment by 1857. A trapped steamboat was used for a ball in January, 1857, while another party followed a few days later.<sup>16</sup>

A new theater, built in 1858, was regarded as a sign of Galena's continuing progress in taste and culture. One theater review also praised improved audience behavior. The writer commented, "There was no hissing; nor was the cheering and stomping untimely, or out of place more than half of the time, which was very uncommon."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Galena North Western Gazette and Advertiser, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1856, December 4, 1856, January 28, 1857.

<sup>15</sup> Galena Advertiser, August 10, 1859.

<sup>16</sup> Galena Gazette and Advertiser, January 6, 1857.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., October 1, 1858, December 1, 1858.



Another cultural institution to develop during the 1830's was Galena's active press.<sup>18</sup> It might be debatable if the early newspapers were more detrimental than beneficial in bringing refinement to Galena. A prime example is the Campbell-Philleo letter writing feud. This commenced in 1835 and included public challenges to duels along with slanderous statements. William Campbell charged Addison Philleo with character assassination. Campbell had previously been indicted for perjury and believed Philleo used influence peddling to sway the grand jury. After stating his case, Campbell publicly challenged Philleo to a duel.<sup>19</sup>

Philleo ignored the challenge and launched a newspaper attack against Campbell who countered with some biting commentary about Philleo. Campbell accused his adversary of aiding local gamblers by luring the gullible to the tables. When Campbell realized Philleo would not duel he wrote one last letter to end the public feud. He said he would pay no

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<sup>18</sup>Galena had several newspapers prior to the Civil War, but only one endured. The North Western Gazette and Galena Advertiser commenced publication in 1834 and continued under this masthead until 1845 when it branched into two papers--the Weekly North-Western Gazette and the Galena Daily Advertiser. This paper is still being published with the title Galena Weekly Gazette and Advertiser. Other Galena papers were the Miners' Journal, 1826-1830; Galena Advertiser, 1829-1830; the Galenian, 1832-1836; the Democrat and Public Advertiser, 1838-1840; the Sentinel, 1843-1844; the Semi-Weekly Jeffersonian, 1844-1847; the Daily Jeffersonian, 1851-1853; and the Daily Courier, 1856-1861.

<sup>19</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, August 1, 1835, August 8, 1835.



more attention to Philleo than he "...would to the barking of a little carrion stuffed dog, which he so much resembles."<sup>20</sup>

The controversies appearing in the papers did not always cease without violence. A duel was fought in 1836 between John Turney, a Galena lawyer, and Sylvester M. Bartlett, owner and editor of the North Western Gazette and Galena Advertiser. Articles in Bartlett's paper attacked certain viewpoints held by Turney. The paper was Whig and missed no opportunity to ridicule the Democratic party and its candidates.<sup>21</sup>

Turney claimed the editor was responsible for what was printed, but Bartlett believed censuring his correspondents would infringe upon the free press. The failure to reach a compromise on their differences led Turney to challenge Bartlett. The two men met at the appointed time and place. They exchanged shots and both missed. The seconds intervened and stopped the duel since honor had been served. Turney remained a Democratic politician while the Gazette and Advertiser continued its former policies.<sup>22</sup>

The last cultural institutions organized in Galena were law and education. It was not until 1838 that serious interest was taken in the law. A jail completed in that year was acclaimed a sure sign of civilization and called a building

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., August 15, 1835, August 29, 1835.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., July 25, 1836; Galena Weekly Gazette, May 9, 1839.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.





for which the city had great need. A citizens group petitioned the city government, in 1838, requesting a house of prostitution be closed. The brothel was labelled a nuisance and dangerous to public morality, but it is not known what course the city government took.<sup>23</sup>

Educational facilities have always been regarded as evidence of advancing civilization. Early schools in Galena were housed in primitive buildings, uncomfortable, and left much to be desired. There was no government funding, and a child was educated only if the parents could afford it.<sup>24</sup>

During the 1830's, schools were started by anyone wishing to do so. One F. Foote began such an operation in 1835. Isolated in an empty wilderness some of Galena's citizens thought themselves fortunate when Foote's school offered a classical education. Dr. A.T. Crow did not share these sentiments. He warned parents against Foote's school claiming the instructor had been chased from other communities for mistreating students.<sup>25</sup> Without a governmental agency to check credentials anyone could call themselves an educator or doctor or lawyer. All that was needed for any profession was a little knowledge and enough faithful clients.

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<sup>23</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, September 15, 1838; Petition to the trustees of the town of Galena, September 7, 1838, Washburne House Library Collection, Galena, Illinois.

<sup>24</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, p. 100.

<sup>25</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, January 31, 1837, February 7, 1838; Galena Galenian, May 15, 1838.



Always closely associated with education are libraries. Galena's first library was organized in 1835 and numbered 725 books by 1838. This prompted one writer to comment it was "...believed that but few libraries of the same number of volumes contain less trash than the Galena library."<sup>26</sup> Thus Galena was on its way to seek social refinement.

The 1830's witnessed two kinds of social growth. Accepted institutions such as churches, schools, and newspapers gained a foothold against rapidly expanding liquor, prostitution, and gambling. This small beginning was important in the next decade as the more favorable institutions gathered momentum. The undesirable elements did not leave, but were ignored by the press and others of society. Actually, the decade of the 1840's was a time of incongruity for Galena. The city, personified by advertisements and editorials, groped for elegance while still an unrefined frontier community.

Part of the desire for elegance was manifested in luxury oriented businesses. Restaurants advertised menus with oyster, turtle, and French soups, and a ladies' hairdresser commenced his trade in 1840. The wholesale firms stocked more personal goods like shower baths, perfumes, hair oils, and fancy shaving soaps. Even book stores opened their doors.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, November 10, 1838.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., October 9, 1840, February 19, 1842, December 16, 1842; Galena North-Western Gazette, April 4, 1848, April 29, 1848, December 12, 1849.



One would suspect from such advertising that Galena was a neatly kept city with accomodating buildings, but this was not the case. The streets, which still served as sewers, remained unpaved, and Main Street business was transacted in crude log huts. An editorial claimed these were the shabbiest looking buildings in the United States.<sup>28</sup>

This dilapidated appearance had financial reasons. Construction in the business district was speculative, and the high rents meant money was lost while a building was being erected. The simple construction of log structures made them the most suitable. Galena's boom economy dictated the need for rapidly constructed business centers, but private dwellings were another matter. Brick was brought into Galena during the 1840's and used to build homes for the more affluent.<sup>29</sup>

The new opulence produced changes in Galena's social and cultural life as well. More intellectual pursuits were used as entertainment, and Galena was part of a lecture circuit bringing speakers on diverse topics to town. After one such lecture, enthusiastic Galenians formed a Phrenological Society for further study. Schools still operated privately, but placed more emphasis upon the social graces. Two dancing

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<sup>28</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, September 18, 1841, September 8, 1843; Galena Semi-Weekly Jeffersonian, February 12, 1846, March 16, 1846, April 2, 1846, July 23, 1846, September 3, 1846.

<sup>29</sup>Galena Semi-Weekly Jeffersonian, April 2, 1846, November 26, 1846.



schools started in 1841 while institutions for young ladies offered French, art, music, and needlework as electives.<sup>30</sup>

Other cultural accomplishments included the formation of a Galena Philharmonic Society and expansion of theater. The first music concert, held in 1842, received favorable reviews. Theater goers had tolerated audience ill behavior in the previous decade, but the increasing gentility of the 1840's would not. One production advertisement prescribed acceptable manners. It stated, "...every attention will be paid to maintain order....No smoking allowed and every improper person immediately expelled....The saloon will be closed."<sup>31</sup>

The new wealth and elegance of the 1840's produced a division in Galena's society. During the pioneer days, there was no appreciable difference between the poor and the affluent. They depended upon each other for survival, but existence was not so uncertain during the 1840's, and the wealthy began to assume airs. This is best illustrated by the Firemen's Grand and Fancy Ball in 1846 which was a fund drive for equipment. The elite of Galena's society were conspicuously absent. Sickness was the excuse although it was added all would be recovered for a ball three days later.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Galena Gazette and Advertiser, July 31, 1840, August 14, 1840, January 17, 1841, November 17, 1841, December 4, 1841, May 7, 1842.

<sup>31</sup> Id., October 30, 1841, January 8, 1842, January 29, 1842, December 2, 1842.

<sup>32</sup> Galena North-Western Gazette, June 15, 1846; Galena Semi-Weekly Jeffersonian, February 25, 1846.





The firemen were very offended. They worked hard to raise the needed money, and it seemed incomprehensible that wealthy property owners would not support them. One man's record delineated the existing social cleavage. He said of the incident:

...it was in bad taste, particularly when it is known that there has been an opinion prevalent amongst some persons, that firemen were mere 'hew-ers of wood and drawers of water', to afford protection to a more 'lordly class.'<sup>33</sup>

The 1840's represented a transitional phase as Galena shifted from a lawless frontier community to a settlement with established mores. It was a time for cultural growth.

The elegance sought after was achieved in the 1850's as homes for the affluent became more ostentatious. The J.R. Jones' house, built in 1857, was unlike any other dwelling in Galena. The three story brick possessed indoor plumbing for water closets and three other systems supplied hot, cold, and ice water. A steam furnace for heating made the structure advanced beyond imagination.<sup>34</sup>

Staying in stride with such modernization, Galena's appearance was refined during the 1850's as brick building replaced log huts. Sections of Main and Bench Streets had plank sidewalk, but the incomplete job caused dissatisfaction with one writer saying ladies were still forced to wade to church.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Galena Semi-Weekly Jeffersonian, February 25, 1841.

<sup>34</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, December 29, 1857.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., June 15, 1852, November 3, 1853, November 29, 1853, July 4, 1854.



Galena also renovated Main Street's lighting. Plans for gas illumination were made in 1855. Coal gasification provided the fuel for 140 street lamps, which was first used in December, 1858.<sup>36</sup>

Other improvements besides physical ones also appeared. Education received a big boost when a public school system was organized in 1852. The local paper called it, "A grand day for Galena," and the event was celebrated with a large parade featuring music and banners.<sup>37</sup> Educational strides continued in both the public and private sectors. A Mercantile College started in December, 1858, with a curriculum covering double-entry bookkeeping, commercial law, and correspondence. Galena's first public high school commenced in the winter of 1859 with classes held at the Methodist Church until a proper building was readied.<sup>38</sup>

Concomitant with the improved educational program was a better caliber of speakers coming to Galena. The town's importance as a commercial center brought in such men as Stephen A. Douglas, Horace Greeley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Abraham Lincoln. Douglas visited Galena in 1852 and 1858, and the Whig paper gave him bad press ratings both times. His speaking talents were berated after the first visit while the

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., August 18, 1855, May , 1855, August 29, 1857, December 7, 1858.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., February 24, 1852.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., December 14, 1858, November 22, 1859.



high point for the 1858 rally, according to the paper, was a fight between the Dubuque and Galena Hibernian Societies.<sup>39</sup>

The other men received better treatment. The Young Men's Association sponsored Greeley's 1855 speech. The paper mentioned Greeley's presence in town but failed to review his lecture. Emerson was also brought in by the Young Men's Association, and a critic said Emerson's talk was equal to his reputation. Lincoln visited Galena while campaigning for John C. Fremont. His address against slavery extension was characterized as a well delivered, forceful argument.<sup>40</sup>

Thus far, Galena's social development has been presented, but it would be incomplete without mentioning minority groups. The Indians were the majority until 1832, but whites viewed them as inferior beings and feared an Indian uprising. This anxiety was manifested by Black Hawk's War.

The full scope of the confrontation is beyond this study, but the possibility of war in 1832 created great local interest. Preparations began after Black Hawk crossed the Mississippi in the spring, and a unit known as the Galena Rangers participated in the first battle. The Indians routed the volunteers, and the retreating army spread panic throughout northwestern Illinois. Settlers left their homes and unfinished fields to seek protection.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., October 19, 1852, August 31, 1858.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., March 27, 1855, January 15, 1856, July 29, 1856.

<sup>41</sup> History of Jo Daviess County, pp. 278-283; Galena Galenian, August 22, 1832.



Galena started a Stockade on May 19, one week after the first battle, when Colonel J.M. Strode declared martial law and forced all able-bodied men to help with the fort. The city's defense plan included periphery night patrols, daily scouting expeditions into the hinterlands, stockpiling supplies, and a 150 man garrison. The United States Army supplied a Lieutenant Gardinier to command local artillery.<sup>42</sup>

Galena's protection was formidable and possibly prevented an attack. The Sac and Fox operated around Galena during June, but never attempted hostilities against the settlement. By July 1, the residents between Cassville, Wisconsin, and Galena fled to the latter for protection. This followed an attack at the Apple River stockade and the murder of three farmers. The paper remarked it was everyone's intention to stay in Galena until the war concluded.<sup>43</sup>

Hostile activities ceased in Jo Daviess County near the middle of July, but the war continued until August when Black Hawk was defeated at Bad Axe. The settlers were safe to leave their sanctuaries but the future seemed grim. Agriculture had been ignored for defense since few had time to plant crops, and the sown fields were ruined. Livestock had roamed freely during the danger and was widely scattered. If the farmer had little to eat, the miners were in worse shape.

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<sup>42</sup>Galena Galenian, May 25, 1832, June 6, 1832, June 13, 1832, June 20, 1832.

<sup>43</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, pp. 291-292; Galena Galenian, July 4, 1832.





Forced to abandon their diggings and without mineral to sell it would be difficult to obtain supplies, but somehow things worked out. The newspaper records indicate no starvation winter for 1832 or any other undue hardship.<sup>44</sup>

Black Hawk's defeat removed the Indians as a Galena ethnic group, but another American people were already in the role of secondary citizens. Blacks have been part of Galena's history since 1822 when they were brought as slaves to work the Johnson claim. The prohibition against slavery in the Northwest Territory was avoided by listing blacks as servants, but this ploy fooled no one. Local government documents for 1837 and 1839 make specific references to Galena's slaves.<sup>45</sup>

Not all blacks in Galena remained slaves. For some, the town represented freedom and opportunity. Swansy Adams was a slave in 1827, and when his master left Galena, in 1828, he forcibly took Adams along. William Hempstead, of Galena, followed them to St. Louis and bought Adams allowing the black man to work off the debt. Adams purchased his freedom and continued working to obtain his wife's liberty. Then he went into business as a Galena water hauler with other local

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<sup>44</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, p. 294; Galena Galenian, August 22, 1832.

<sup>45</sup>History of Jo Daviess County, p. 257; County Commissioners' Court Record Vol. I, p. 23, County Clerk's Office, Jo Daviess County, Illinois; Galena Gazette and Advertiser, April 29, 1837.



blacks working as teamsters, servants, miners, and steamboat deckhands.<sup>46</sup>

Galena's opportunities for blacks did not lessen bigotry. The evidence is scarce, but racial tension did exist. The first instance, in 1839, was a black man being penalized \$100 for whistling. Three years later a fire of unknown origin destroyed the black school, but this may have been accidental. The bigotry never produced any serious violence except for some black men throwing a Galena policeman from a bridge which the paper labelled a dangerous precedent.<sup>47</sup>

The blacks were a visible minority group in Galena, but others, less perceptible, made the town an international community. Germans were numerous in most occupations. There is very little recorded about them, but evidence indicates their importance to the community. One Dr. Hemje proposed to teach German to Galena's young men. His pitch was the large German population made it a logical second language for a businessman. Plans were made, in 1854, to print a German paper at Galena, but there are no known surviving issues.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, January 20, 1838, February 28, 1839; Galena North-Western Gazette, January 20, 1852, September 4, 1854; Galena Weekly Gazette, April 30, 1880, August 6, 1880.

<sup>47</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, September 8, 1839, September 23, 1842; Galena North-Western Gazette, August 20, 1856.

<sup>48</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, September 24, 1847, October 31, 1854.



The Germans represented a quiet, well respected minority but, on the other side of the coin were the Irishmen. This is not to say the Irish were unrespected, but they did receive more bad press than the Germans. In 1846 and 1848, there were small mob actions by Galena's Irish population. The 1846 incident arose from an Irish deckhand being beaten on the steamboat Galena while the captain did nothing to punish the offender. Word of the incident spread after the vessel docked, and angry Irishmen collected at the Galena levee. An attack against the captain forced the steamer to leave port, but it safely returned when the momentary passion ceased.<sup>49</sup>

The other incident involved the forcible freeing of a prisoner. British police traced a murder suspect to a mining camp near Galena. The English agent, with his associates, obtained the proper papers and arrested the Irishman. The suspect and guards retired to the third floor of a Galena hotel at six p.m., and Irish miners started gathering shortly thereafter. Several men urged the crowd to disperse, but at nine p.m. the mob stormed the hotel and freed their countryman. There was no violence except for one small matter. An over zealous policeman was tossed from the third floor balcony, but he survived. The crowd dissipated after the accused man was safely on his way. This occurrence produced repercussions

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., April 3, 1846; Galena Semi-Weekly Jeffersonian, March 30, 1846, April 1, 1846.



for months, but no legal action was started to punish the participants.<sup>50</sup>

The Irish contribution to Galena was not all detrimental. Galena's Irishmen formed the Friends of the Repeal of the Union Between Great Britain and Ireland in 1843; as the name implies the function was to aid Irish independence. Membership was open to anybody with one dollar for annual dues. The first meeting had 204 people and collected \$267 in fees. It is unknown how long the Repeal Association remained viable, but it was still active in 1845 when a benefit ball raised 409 in one night. The affair attracted 650 people. Another organization in 1847 collected \$1,244 to aid famine stricken Ireland.<sup>51</sup>

Besides Germans and Irishmen there were other European people in or near Galena. Their numbers were too small to gather much notice, but they helped bring Galena full circle from a crude frontier settlement to an international city.

Galena's permanent settlement began in 1823 when the Meeker party brought a need for social institutions previously lacking at the Fever River mines. The period from 1827 to 1839 was a time of burgeoning growth and important social and cultural establishments began in this span. These were the formative years for Galena's social development. Religion,

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<sup>50</sup> Galena North-Western Gazette, May 23, 1848, May 30, 1848, June 7, 1848, June 21, 1848, December 27, 1848.

<sup>51</sup> Galena Gazette and Advertiser, August 13, 1843, September 15, 1843, December 8, 1843, February 21, 1845; Galena North-Western Gazette, March 15, 1847, November 19, 1847.





law, and the press all expanded in the 1840's. This growth, in conjunction with lessening frontier conditions and increasing wealth, produced a divided society. The affluent social leaders wished to keep distance between themselves and the working people. The Galena Gazette and Advertiser, for the 1850's was very lax about reporting social affairs as commercial news crowded out local matters. The business information, however, does supply some data about the social scene. People were taking more pride in Galena, and the improvements made were as much for esthetics as utilitarian purposes. The town rapidly advanced from log buildings and mud streets to the cultural center for the upper Mississippi valley.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Very little scholarly work has been done with Galena's history. Vague references to the lead trade is about the extent to which the town is mentioned. Galena is too significant for that, but the town's economic collapse and Chicago's development doomed Galena to obscurity. A romanticized, popular history has evolved to fill the void, but it is more detrimental than informative.

As the "town that time forgot"<sup>1</sup> Galena sells an illusion of history to people harried by modern day living. People plagued with high taxes, crime in the streets, a faltering economy, and dishonest politicians are often convinced life was better during Galena's boom period. Unfortunately, they are confusing the city's hey-day with the turn of the century small town image that Galena's entrepreneurs so carefully cultivate. During its peak Galena had every single problem that people wish to escape from today, plus a few more that made existence harsh by present standards.

Galena's contributions to state and national history are many. Galena was the scene for Federal experimentation with

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<sup>1</sup> This is a term someone coined to describe Galena, and it is most often used in travel folders.



a semisocialistic state from 1832 to 1847. The federal government administered the entire region, prohibited individual ownership of land, and controlled the lead trade. Other private enterprises, however, were encouraged. A regulated economy was accepted when profits were good, but a price slump in 1829 started the fight for a free market. Federal control was retained until 1847 when the market was relinquished to supply and demand.

Galena's provincial government started in 1835 and its quality varied widely throughout the years. The city government seemed more interested in collecting money than improving the city, and Galena constantly experienced financial difficulties. It seems moral compunctions against conflict of interest were ignored by most local politicians. More research is necessary to determine how widespread corruption was, but enough evidence exists to show Galena's politicians were not always men motivated by a sense of honor.

Galena's major contribution was creating great wealth for and encouraging settling of Illinois. It is normally assumed that Chicago has always been the state's economic leader, but while Chicago was still just a backwater Galena was a significant commercial center. It is important to note, in 1836, a proposed railroad between the two cities was called the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad. Galena's prominence gave it top billing.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Galena Gazette and Advertiser, April 2, 1836; Galena North-Western Gazette, August 10, 1836.



The lead trade started Galena's wealth which later branched into many other areas. As the emporium of the upper Mississippi Galena drew praise and complaint. Residents in Grant and Iowa Counties, Wisconsin, believed Galena merchants were fleecing them, and they organized the town of Sinipee in 1856 to break Galena's monopoly. Sinipee's location near swamps doomed it to failure. The town was abandoned before a year passed since the residents could not cope with sickness.<sup>3</sup>

Galena's nearest commercial rival was Dubuque, Iowa, but contemporary accounts indicate Dubuque was not a serious competitor. A Springfield, Illinois, newspaper commenting in 1855 said one month of Galena's trade exceeded a full year of Dubuque's. During a four day period in May, 1856, Dubuque had 4 steamers come to port and exchanged 1,950 tons of freight and 1,455 passengers. A single day of this same period had 3 steamers call at Galena with 2,500 tons of freight moved and 2,175 passengers.<sup>4</sup> People in Galena believed Dubuque would always be a depot for agricultural goods while Galena's preeminence would continue.<sup>5</sup>

The opposite happened as Galena declined and Dubuque became more successful. When Galena's downfall began is

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<sup>3</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, June 21, 1855; Theodore Rodolf, "Pioneering in the Wisconsin Lead Region," Wisconsin Historical Collection, Vol. 18 (1881), pp. 360-361.

<sup>4</sup>It is not clear from the source if the passenger numbers represent arrivals and departures or included all people on board regardless of destination.

<sup>5</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, June 28, 1856, May 6, 1856.





debatable, but the California Gold Rush is a turning point in the town's history. As a pivotal juncture, the gold rush may be more psychological than economic. Galena's original wealth was the lead trade, and others followed the prospectors to provide creature comforts. The process repeated itself with the gold rush since not all who left were miners. Hotel keepers, farmers, and merchants advertised sales to raise money for the trip. One man's diary remarked the gold fever was bad in Galena as groups numbering seven to seventy left town.<sup>6</sup>

The California Gold Rush is significant for two reasons--one of which is the declining lead production after 1848. The other reason was a long term development revealing Galena's economic security more unstable than contemporaries thought. If the major producers can be so easily induced to leave, the town must eventually be ruined.<sup>7</sup> Galena was fortunate to have diversification or collapse would have been immediate. The other business concerns temporarily absorbed the loss.

Galena's bubble did not burst, it was more like a slow leak. The railroad was expected to fill the gap and Galena would be the United States' rail center. For a short time, it looked as if this might happen when negotiations in 1855

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., January 2, 1849, January 2., 1849, January 31, 1849, April 14, 1850; Benjamin F. Felt Diary, Galena Library Historical Collection, Galena, Illinois.

<sup>7</sup>The Galena North-Western Gazette for August 4, 1851, estimated 1,000 miners left the region for the California gold fields.



sought to bring three new lines to town. Galena investors took a beating with these as none ever materialized, but still the Illinois Central promised great things. As the line neared completion in 1854 hundreds of people arrived daily in Galena. Fourteen stages a day were required to accommodate travelers between Galena and rail's end at Warren.<sup>8</sup>

What seemed assured prosperity caused other major investments. A stock company formed in May, 1855, to build a hotel. Construction began shortly thereafter and the DeSoto House opened in April, 1856. The five story brick structure was the largest hotel in the West. The cost for building and furnishing it came to 110,000, and the facilities were extensive. A ten horsepower engine was required for pumping water to the third floor baths and toilets, and the kitchen used a roaster capable of cooking for 500 people. It is doubtful such an investment would have been made had Galena's future been known.<sup>9</sup>

One year after the DeSoto Hotel's completion a fire destroyed over a block of Galena's business district. Thirty-two buildings were consumed and the estimated loss was \$300,000. Secure in a belief for Galena's continuing prosperity, reconstruction began immediately. Three months after the fire

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<sup>8</sup>Galena North-Western Gazette, April 19, 1853, May 21, 1853, June 7, 1853, July 1, 1853, April 21, 1854, May 9, 1854.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., May 10, 1855, May 12, 1855, April 10, 1856, May 1, 1856.



twenty-one buildings were being erected and some businesses had moved into completed lower floors.<sup>10</sup>

Building an iron bridge, in 1848, was the last major undertaking before the Civil War. This was the first such structure west of the Great Lakes and is another example of the faith in Galena, but it was all in vain. The proposed railroads, the DeSoto House, and the other new buildings were Galena's death throes. The declining trade in the late 1840's was irreversible. Business failures began in 1850 and by the end of the Civil War almost half Galena's enterprises had liquidated.<sup>11</sup>

After the War the entire nation was changed and Galena had outlasted its usefulness. Displaced Southerners and restless Northerners moved west making the Missouri River the main artery for transportation while new gold and silver mines replaced the Fever River lead. The long cattle drives were a new adventure for young men, and the trans-continental railroad bypassed the city. Galena's own U.S. Grant was President, but even he did not stay in town for long. Following his example, others took their money and left to start again elsewhere.

Thus Galena ended as an important commercial center. The city that once attracted settlers from the world over and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., April 3, 1850, July 1, 1850.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., September 11, 1850, Nov. 1, 1850; August 11. Mettlin, Recollections of Seventy Years (Galena, Illinois: The Quinette Publishing Company, 1903), p. 1.



brought rudimentary social refinement to the upper Mississippi valley was forgotten. Galena entered a long hibernation after the War only to be rediscovered about a century later. Today, Galena successfully survives through its history as an active tourist center.





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